



PHD

**Fostering a disposition to life-long learning: policy assumptions and pupils' perceptions at key stage 3**

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**FOSTERING A DISPOSITION  
TO LIFE-LONG LEARNING:  
POLICY ASSUMPTIONS AND  
PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS AT KEY STAGE 3**

**submitted by Norma Adair  
for the degree of PhD  
of the University of Bath  
2003**

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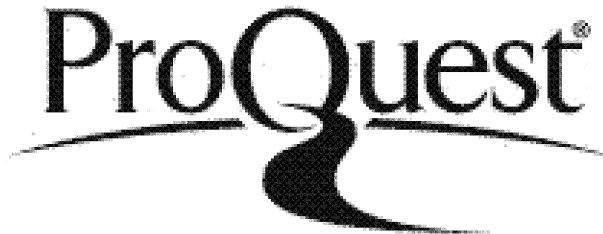
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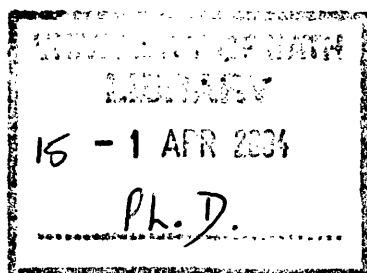
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## **Abstract**

This thesis considers to what extent current education policy in England, as translated into practice helps or hinders the creation of appropriate dispositions towards lifelong learning. It explores the assumptions that underpin current government policy on education in England, about factors that may affect learning and compares these with the perceptions pupils have about the factors. The study focuses on Key Stage 3, that is, secondary education for 11-14 year olds.

Data were gathered from pupils in the south of England with a range of socio-economic resources available to them. Students were selected across the range of prior achievement as measured by cognitive ability and national 'Key Stage' tests. Through the conduct of a longitudinal survey by interview data were collected regarding pupils' perceptions of concepts of learning, motivation, ability and aspirations.

I argue that policy-makers assume education to be important for national economic wellbeing, privileging a concept of learning that starts with the transmission of 'facts' and skills and ends with testing and the gaining of credentials. They assume that testing and the gaining of qualifications is the means by which to motivate the learner to perform reliably, as learners aim to gain the credentials required to achieve their career aspirations.

Drawing on analytic studies of the narratives of 25 learners I show that these assumptions percolate into the thinking of young people. In doing so, I argue, education policy does not necessarily prevent the creation of positive dispositions to lifelong learning, but may hinder most those pupils' education policy purports require greatest help if lifelong learning is to become a 'reality' for all.



## **Chapter 1: Fostering a Disposition to Lifelong Learning: structuring an ill-structured problem**

### **Introduction**

Nationally and internationally the concept of ‘lifelong learning’ permeates the rhetoric of economic, social and educational policy. Making ‘lifelong learning’ a reality for all has become a policy imperative throughout the world (Gass, 1996; OECD, 1996; Fryer, 1997; DfEE, 1998; EURYDICE, 2000; 2001; Aspin et al, 2001). Underpinning ‘lifelong learning’ is the notion that all people must become ‘lifelong learners’ so that:

“while everyone is able to learn, all must become motivated to learn, and should be actively encouraged to do so, throughout life.” (OECD, 1996: p. 27)

In England policy makers place great importance on the notion of life-long learning, insisting as they do, on the need to foster “. . . an enquiring mind and the love of learning” (DfEE, 1998: p. 7). They claim that:

“. . . we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives. We cannot rely on a small elite . . . For many people this will mean overcoming past experiences which have put them off learning.” (DfEE, 1998: p. 7)

They assume that:

“Acquiring the learning habit early will help individuals to sustain it later in life.” (DfEE, 1998: p. 45)

While this appears on the surface, laudable, ‘fostering a disposition to lifelong learning’ is an “ill-structured problem” (Haig, 1987; 1996) that requires development. In this chapter I discuss the concepts of ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘disposition’ before turning to explore ‘the problem’ as policy-makers appear to view it in terms of the relationship between secondary education and the ‘making’ of lifelong learners. In turn, this leads me to

develop a framework for inquiry based around ‘frames of reference’ that constitute a basis for lifelong learning. The purpose here is to address the central question of this thesis: to what extent does New Labour’s education policy help or hinder the fostering of appropriate dispositions towards lifelong learning. The initial challenge, therefore, is to restructure the ill-structured problem into research questions before providing an overview of the structure of the thesis.

### **Conceptualising ‘lifelong learning’**

Although the term ‘lifelong learning’ is used profusely in political rhetoric, a definitive, uncontested meaning for the concept of ‘lifelong learning’ is unlikely to be found (Aspin, and Chapman, 2001). However, some discussion needs to take place in order to guide the reader in their understanding of how the term has been applied within the context of this thesis. One area of contention that arises as to the meaning of the term ‘lifelong learning’ is whether it is referring to learning as a preparation *for* adult life; the distribution of education *throughout* life; or education from all the events an individual is consciously involved in throughout the life-span, that is learning *from* life (Wain, 2001). Preparation for adult life consists of formal compulsory education ‘topped up’ by further or higher education and vocational training to meet the needs of the workplace or for self-fulfilment (Wain, 2001). This Wain (2001) refers to as “continuing education” and, he argues, it is the predominant way of conceptualising ‘lifelong learning’. Lifelong learning viewed as ‘continuing education’ assumes learning to occur in formal hierarchically structured systems which may include pre-school through to university, and through ‘non-formal’ organisational activity that is outside the formal educational structures but which is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives. While a ‘preparation for life’ is sometimes regarded as including mass compulsory schooling or, as it is sometimes referred to, ‘foundation’ (Ainley, 1998: OECD, 1996) or ‘front-end’ learning (Tight, 1998a; OECD, 1996), this is not always the case. ‘Lifelong learning’ as a preparation for life is often used to mean ‘adult learning’ (Wain, 1987) or learning that occurs after the completion of compulsory schooling (Tight, 1998b). This is not the conceptualisation of ‘lifelong learning’ proffered by the OECD who regard the term to

mean that conscious learning does not cease at 16, 18 or 21 but continues throughout the life-span but who also state that 'lifelong learning' should not be regarded as synonymous with adult education.

The distribution of learning throughout life concurs with 'recurrent' (Wain, 2001). For Wain this means that 'life' is separated from 'education' so that 'education' is regarded as:

“... formal, intended, learning activities and processes carried on apart from 'life' and under the direction of teachers, in places set apart for the purpose ...” (Wain, 2001: p. 185).

Throughout an individual's life, there may be a need to spasmodically return to formal education or training after compulsory schooling has been completed alternating learning with work, leisure or retirement (OECD, 1996).

Learning from life assumes 'lifelong learning' to incorporate not only formal and non-formal learning episodes but also 'informal learning' which Wain (1987) defines as the lifelong process of developing and gaining attitudes, values, skills and knowledge through the experience of life. Valid learning does not only take place through organised, structured, conscious and measurable activities (OECD, 1996). But where the OECD shy away from discussion of other forms of intentional and unintentional learning because they claim such learning is difficult to analyse, those holding a 'maximalist' conceptualisation of 'lifelong learning' believe such learning needs to be incorporated into discussions. A 'maximalist' concept of 'lifelong learning' thus includes learning from life, for life, throughout life and includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. As shall be shown in Chapter 2 this view of 'lifelong learning' blends well with social constructivist theories of learning and symbolic interactionist beliefs about behaviours.

If 'lifelong learning' is partially about learning *for* life, what 'learning' is thought to be required? Here again there is a myriad of possible responses dependent upon the assumed rationale for the apparent pressing need for lifelong learning. Aspin and Chapman (2001)

propose that 'lifelong learning' has a triadic nature, being for economic progress; personal development; and social inclusiveness and democratic understanding. This forms a useful starting point to consider some of the great variety of rationales given for lifelong learning.

### *Lifelong learning for economic progress*

"Learning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition." (DfEE, 1998: p. 7)

"Education is the best economic policy we have." (Tony Blair cited in DfEE, 1998: p. 9)

In the contemporary cultural context of advanced capitalism (Bagnall, 2001) governments around the world emphasise the urgent requirement for lifelong learning as a means to manage globalisation and the rapid technological advancements that are purported to threaten nations with the "evil spell of technological unemployment" (UNESCO, 1998). But there is more to the globalisation debate than this.

### **Globalisation and lifelong learning**

The creation of a global economy can arguably be dated to the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Brown and Lauder, 1996), although as Aronowitz and De Fazio (1994) point out forms of globalisation have been in existence for centuries. Nevertheless modern globalisation has seen a growth in world trade, increased cultural interaction and, with reduced transportation costs and the growth of communication technology, a move by multi-national corporations to expand across the globe. With the move to the globalisation of economic activity have come changes in work patterns. Companies can afford to move routine production to those areas of the world where incomes are lowest, productivity meets expectations and regulations are conducive to company requirements. Whether it is

car component manufacturers, telecommunication production, data processors or call centre operatives, companies are able and willing to switch 'production' to wherever in the world is most likely to cut their costs while retaining their required standards. Countries able to attract multi-national corporations into their countries, especially in the developing world, have seen the creation of work and the provision of earnings. But there have been losers. According to Reich (1991) there has been a rapid reduction in the number of 'routine producers' jobs (that is skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manufacturing), hastened not only by globalisation but with automation of routine tasks. 'In-person servers' (that is those employed in the service sector) have fared only a little better. Although there has been an increase in certain jobs in the sector, others have declined, some service jobs going overseas. As more people have entered the job market for the service jobs available so the wage rates have been able to be lowered. Only in the knowledge industries has there been a rapid rise and even here, job stability no longer seems as sure as it appeared a few years ago. No nation is immune from these job losses. As corporations discover cheaper and less regulated labour markets anywhere in the world, they will shut up shop and move on, thus AT&T produced telephones in America in the late 1970s, in Singapore in the 1980s and Thailand in the 1990s (Reich, 1991).

The problem facing nation states then has become one of managing an economy they are now no longer fully in control of (Brown et al, 1997). The magnitude of the effects of globalisation is a source of debate amongst theorists, as are the effects themselves (Wells et al, 1998). The broad solution to the problem of national competitiveness, the management of industrial and technological change and the employability of individuals, peddled by politicians around the globe (Coffield, 1999a) is the need to create a high skills, high wage economy (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001) through, at least in part, an increasingly 'learned' populace. Knowledge-rich economies will require "human agency" rather than "human labour" where workers are "reflexive, decisional and potentially creative" rather than repetitive or imitative (Strain, 1998).

Two interconnected debates arise from this: whether the whole populace needs to have "innovative capabilities" (Jones and Hatcher, 1994) and whether the drive for a more

'learned' society will actually result in the hoped for growth in the economy (Hughes and Tight, 1995; Robinson, 1999). Globally Ilon (1994, cited in Smyth and Dow, 1998) has predicted that it is the elite who will require an education designed to equip them for global employment in information gathering, manipulation, management and creation while the majority of the workers around the world will be competing for low paid, low skilled jobs. Companies will, Ilon argues, look to nations able to provide workers with a minimum level of education in literacy and numeracy along with discipline and tolerance, thus nation-states will need to provide the masses with these qualities for inward investment to occur. While this may be so, if a nation seeks to develop and reap the assumed rewards of a 'high skills' economy they need to consider ways in which they can rid themselves of a low skills equilibrium. That is they need to develop solutions that will allow for the removal of the social and economic factors that retain too great a proportion of the workforce in low skill work (Lauder, 1999). Their choices, Lauder (1999; 2000) argues, will help to determine the degree of success they have in achieving the hoped for economic growth. For politicians 'lifelong learning' has become a dominant rhetoric (Coffield, 1999a; Edwards and Nicholl, 2001) to provide just such a solution, yet cast a glance over the thoughts of Ilon, above, and it becomes apparent that the 'type' of learning might be a significant factor in determining the probability of achieving 'high skills' status. The development of 'high skills' requirements may necessitate different approaches to those required for the development of basic skills. The education policies adopted to promote basic skills may do no more than reinforce a reliance on low skills work.

Even if education policy is able to provide the foundations for the building of a high skills economy, Felstead et al (1999) are right to remind us that merely creating a greater supply of educated workers does not itself necessarily result in the demand for skills rising. In 1997 in Britain, three in ten graduates were in jobs that did not require a degree, a figure similar to that for 1986; one in five workers holding any qualification at all reported that no qualification was needed for their job (Felstead et al, 1999). Without the requisite supply of other economic and social policies to support lifelong learning there may be no point in it.

### *Lifelong learning for personal development*

Bagnall (2001) argues that there are three “progressive sentiments” which inform ideology, theory and advocacy of lifelong learning: the individual, the democratic and the adaptive). Each “progressive” sentiment understands lifelong learning in terms of the liberation of the individual. They differ in what they believe the liberation is from (ignorance, oppression and poverty respectively) and how this may be achieved through ‘lifelong learning’. One of the “progressive sentiments” described by Bagnall (2001), is that of the individual. Those promoting lifelong learning through the individual progressive sentiment believe learning to be important to liberate the individual from ignorance through cognitive and intellectual development, from dependence through the acquisition of skills and socialisation into social conventions and practices, from constraint through the transformation of perspectives by which individual’s frame their understanding and from inadequacy through individual growth and development. With the increased lack of security in jobs, in part as a result of globalisation, feelings of inadequacy or fear of uselessness are increasing (Strain, 2000). Changes in family structure bring with it its own insecurities and the need for realignment to ever changing contexts in the home and the community. In traditional societies, Strain claims, the individual’s place and purpose in life was relatively unchallengeable. Now each individual must find out for themselves who they are and what life they can make for themselves (Strain, 2000), carving out their own place and choosing to fulfil their own desires (Bagnall, 2001). In changing times, personal identities will be formed and re-formed throughout life and learners will require the development of critical and reflexive awareness of themselves (Quicke, 1999). In contemporary society individuals will need to be able to re-create themselves (Bagnall, 2001) in order to accommodate themselves in ever changing worlds and cope with change (Fryer, 1997). Learning for personal development is seen as an endless journey of human development (Bagnall, 2001) that promotes and enhances the autonomy and capability of the individual as an agent and develops a sense of self-efficacy and self-worth (Strain, 2000). Learning throughout life should, along with other aims, be directed toward helping people be “masters of their own

destiny” in a period of rapid change and globalisation (UNESCO, 1998). It should enable everyone

“... to improve the quality of their lives through the development of their intellect and imagination” (IPPR, 1993).

### *Lifelong learning for social inclusion and democracy*

Those advocating learning for democracy seek to liberate the individual from inherited authority and oppression through informing social action to create a more humane, tolerant, just, egalitarian society as well as remaining vigilant for new forms of oppression and exploitation (Bagnall, 2001). Not only should learning be about helping individuals shape their own lives, it should also encourage them to contribute to the development of society (UNESCO, 1998). Strain (2000), goes further, suggesting that the capability of the self is “inescapably a social creation” (p. 293), where we are only able to develop our own identities and agency through co-operative interdependence with others in society. People need to be prepared to become involved and have the moral courage to speak out in the public sphere (Strain, 2000; Coffield, 2002). They need to work with others to identify the public good and solve the many problems faced by society that require co-operation and mutual understandings of diverse needs and claims (Strain, 2000). Lifelong learning is a conduit for communal and social interests, helping people to work together more effectively in order to pursue shared objectives (Ecclestone, 1999) providing everyone with a stake in society (Coffield, 2000). Based on the work of Bernstein, Coffield (2000) suggests that there are three democratic rights that are required in order that such a stake is possible. Firstly there is an individual right to advancement personally, intellectually, socially and materially as well as the right to the development of critical intelligence (Coffield, 2002). Secondly, everyone has the social right to be included, or to be separate, if the individual so wishes. Thirdly, there is the political right to participate in the construction of the social order. For those of a ‘democratic’ persuasion, the rationale for lifelong learning is in the realisation of these rights.



But, while it is laudable to encourage the social inclusion and active participation of all citizens in the democratic development of their society, another perspective is worth airing. This is the 'compulsory' aspect of lifelong learning (Tight, 1998a; 1998b; Coffield, 1999a; Ecclestone, 1999) where lifelong learning is turned into a moral obligation (Heinz, 1999; Bagnall, 2001). Individuals are expected to be willing (or at least coerced) to participate in continuous learning, not only for their own development and well-being, but because the well-being of others in society also depend upon it (Ecclestone, 1999). Individuals become responsible for their own learning, including sharing the financial burden of learning (Fryer, 1997; Coffield, 1999a; 1999b; Bagnall, 2001), as well as creating conditions that aid the development of others (Strain, 2000). Those who fail to participate may be pressurised to do so because lifelong learning is regarded as being in the interests of the wider society (Ecclestone, 1999). At least they are likely to be blamed for their own 'failure' (Hughes and Tight, 1995) and for society's ills as well as being stigmatised for their non-participation and potential social exclusion (Tight 1998b). Yet as Coffield (1999b) reminds us, those who do not participate are likely to be those least able to take on the responsibility of their own learning.

With these disparate views of lifelong learning in mind, what dispositions are required for lifelong learning?

### **Dispositions for lifelong learning**

It is highly problematic attempting to identify the dispositions required for lifelong learning. Governmental reports call for a desire to make sense of experience, for critical reflection, creative initiative, confidence and self-esteem (Fryer, 1997), for a love of learning, a thirst for knowledge, imagination, ingenuity, and a commitment to continuous self-improvement (DfEE, 1998). Learners need to be intrinsically motivated, self-managed, independent (OECD, 1996), and able to take risks (EURYDICE, 2001).

Reviewing research, Claxton (1999) has concluded that there are three dispositions required for lifelong learning: resilience, resourcefulness and reflectiveness although this

list has since been amended to resilience, playfulness, and reciprocity (Carr and Claxton, 2002). Coffield (2000; 2002) displays a “healthy scepticism” toward the myriad lists provided in the literature of dispositions that are required to become a life-long learner. As he points out, lists do not of themselves result in problem resolution. Part of the difficulty with the notion of ‘dispositions’ is that, according to current theory, being orientations to practice (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000) dispositions are situated and contextual (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Sadler, 2002; Katz, 2002). Thus they are not fixed, but are uncertain and volatile (Sadler, 2002). Nor are particular dispositions necessarily positive in all situations. Katz (2002) usefully highlights that a ‘positive’ or ‘desirable’ disposition may be used to develop socially ‘undesirable’ practices. The desirability or otherwise will depend on the perspective from which the practice is being viewed. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties with the notion of dispositions, there is a value to considering how dispositions may be formed, transformed, learned or modified (Stasz, 1997) and in what contexts they manifest themselves (Katz, 2002). Additionally, consideration needs to be made of the possible differences in ‘positive’ dispositions required for each of the perspectives about the rationale for lifelong learning as given above.

### *Dispositions for economic development*

As has been shown earlier, ‘economic development’ is itself a problematic term. Where some literatures highlight the growth of high skills and knowledge based economies, other literatures reminds us of a different scenario: that of increasing low skill and service sector employment that requires basic literacy and numeracy along with discipline and tolerance (Ilon, 1994, cited in Smyth and Dow, 1998). Knowledge rich economies, it is claimed, require human agency. Learners need to be reflexive, decisional and creative rather than learning to be repetitive and imitative (Strain, 1998) as are the dispositions required in a low skills economy. Whether high or low skilled, individuals need to be adaptive and flexible as changes to employment skills and employment patterns occur ever more frequently with developments in technology and the increasing ability of employers to relocate in order to maximize their own well-being. Employees must, therefore, become

more committed and more flexible at the same time as being increasingly dispensable and less secure in their employment (Coffield, 1999a; Ecclestone, 1999; Heinz, 1999). If the world of work is portrayed as uncertain and insecure, individuals may require creativity, imagination and ingenuity in contending with periods of unemployment and re-employment as well as re-skilling. They are likely to need to learn how to maintain their self-confidence and self-esteem even when they are “cast aside” by employers “when the economic going gets tough” (Ecclestone, 1999). They may wish to make sense of their experience and part of that ‘sense’ may be to critically question the social structures that support an insecure and uncertain world.

### *Dispositions for democracy*

According to Coffield (2000)

“... citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require a healthy scepticism, a critical faculty to enable them to insist on politicians, experts of all kinds, and teachers and researchers providing evidence and reasoned argument rather than promotional hype” (p. 35).

Critical understanding or critical intelligence is required so that individuals are able to challenge implicit assumptions, think of possible and preferable futures and shape the present culture to work toward these aspirations (Coffield, 2002). There is also a need for people to be willing to be involved and to speak out in the public sphere (Strain, 2000) as well as being alert to the possibility of oppression and exploitation (Bagnall, 2001).

### *Dispositions for compulsory learning*

Another model of ‘lifelong learning’ is one that takes as its basis the notion that learning is a means of social control. Learning is viewed as a social process designed to ensure that individual members of society conform to the changing expectations of society where it becomes a “normative expectation” to be involved in learning (Coffield, 1999a). Those

who transgress may be pressurised into learning (Ecclestone, 1999), learning becoming a certificated good, conferred by external 'authority' (Strain, 2000) rather than a learning 'habit' decided on by individuals themselves. In this model learners require a disposition to compliance rather than one of critical intelligence. Learners are 'enforced' to take responsibility for their own lives. While 'taking responsibility' is one of the aims of those promoting lifelong learning on the grounds of personal development, 'responsibility' can act as a means to transfer blame onto the powerless members of society for their own failure (Hughes and Tight, 1995).

### *Dispositions for personal development*

For those who privilege personal development as the rationale for learning, learners require a tendency to enjoy learning for its own sake, being intrinsically motivated. They are likely to seek to master knowledge and skills rather than perform for external reward, seeking to make sense of their experiences. They will be committed to self-improvement and will have the confidence and self-esteem to be self-directed and independent (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000; Bagnall, 2001). Learners seeking personal development and self-fulfilment may need to have a critical understanding of their own identities being reflexively aware of themselves as learners as well as of learning processes and what it means to learn (Quicke, 1999; Rees et al, 1997). These are the dispositions purported to be at the heart of current educational policy (DfEE, 1997; 1998).

### **Education Policy Context**

This study focuses on Key Stage 3 (11-14 year olds) pupils in England, an age range that teachers frequently cite as that when the desire to learn is being lost by students. It is not, only teachers that come to the conclusion that there is a 'problem' with early secondary education. Nationally and internationally we are encouraged to believe this to be so.

"From (basic education) onwards, educational contents should be designed to stimulate a love of learning and knowledge and thus develop the desire and

provide the opportunities for learning throughout life. This brings us to one of the major problem areas in any reform, that of the policies to be applied to the period of adolescence and youth, between primary education and work or higher education. To coin a phrase, secondary schools cut rather a sorry figure in educational thinking. They are the target of considerable criticism and they provoke a considerable amount of frustration. “ (UNESCO, 1998: p. 26)

Closer to home education policy focussed especially, in the early years of New Labours’ administration, on the ‘problems’ of primary education. By 2001 their attention began to shift the focus to the reform of Key Stage 3 education (DfES, 2001a). ‘Schools Achieving Success’ (DfES, 2001a) laid out the rationale for the need for change in this sector of education; it stated the problems perceived to exist within the sector and provided the policy claimed to be designed to eradicate the ‘problems’.

### *The Rationale for Change*

Like the education policy documents of the late 1990s the reasons given for a need for improvement in education juxtapose the economic with the personal; the social with the individual and in so doing retain the persuasive rhetorical powers required by politicians to influence public opinion (Edwards and Nicholl, 2001).

“Education remains the Government’s top priority. The success of our children at school is crucial to the economic health and social cohesion of the country as well as to their own life chances and personal fulfilment. A generation ago Britain tolerated an education system with a long tail of poor achievement because there was a plentiful supply of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. This is no longer the case.” (DfES, 2001a: p. 5)

The government, while pronouncing that low skills jobs are reducing in number, a ‘fact’ that may itself be contentious (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001), continue to promote the notion that the ‘solution’ to employment and the health of the economy lies in improving

the quantity and ‘quality’ of education. The problem with education as inferred in the quote above is the long tail of poor achievement.

*What is the problem with education?*

According to policy-makers, the overriding problem within education, and especially secondary education, in England is that of an achievement gap between those who do ‘achieve’ and those who do not. Boys, it is claimed, do not achieve so much as girls, nor do children who have parents with a manual occupation as compared to those children who have parents from a non-manual background. Additionally, there is an achievement gap in terms of ethnicity.

More specifically, the government lists as problems poor literacy and numeracy test scores especially in terms of progression between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3; too few young people entering high quality education and training post-16, both in terms of further and higher education; poor positions in international comparisons; and worsening behaviour, motivation and attitude towards study (DfES, 2001a).

The message permeating from the policy-makers, then is that all people must be encouraged to learn throughout life but that, in order to ensure it is not only a “small elite” that do so, there is a need to overcome the past experiences that have put others off learning. The focus group that requires attention is those students who are regarded as poor achievers during formal education.

*What are the proposed solutions?*

As well as adopting a neo-liberal strategy of reliance on the mechanisms of the market to allegedly drive up quality through customer choice, the present Labour government has proposed a range of measures to be introduced in secondary schools both at Key Stage 3 and through changes to the 14-19 curriculum that appear to attempt to amalgamate traditionalist views with those of ‘modernisers’. The assumed poor literacy and numeracy

progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is to be fixed by a 'Key Stage 3 strategy' which promotes 'excellent materials' and inculcates teachers in the means of delivery of literacy and numeracy skills. Students will continue to be tested and to "reinforce the strategy" there will be a policy of naming and shaming through the publication of league tables. To add additional impetus "ambitious" targets will be set for English, mathematics, science and ICT.

Along with the drive toward the improvement of 'basic skills', as we have seen, claimed to be necessary for nations attempting to attract 'low skills' employment as well or instead of 'high skills' opportunities, comes some recognition of the possible different educational requirements for supporting a 'high skills' economy. These include "learning how to reason, think logically and creatively and to take increasing responsibility for their own learning" (DfES, 2001a: p. 18). Yet these are not the criteria on which the quality of Key Stage 3 education achievement are to be judged; assessment remains locked in Key Stage tests of core curriculum subjects. But even in assessment the rhetoric of the most recent education policy White Paper acknowledges in words at least, that assessment for learning may consist of more than summative testing for here is said, that teachers will be offered support "to improve their skills in providing feedback to pupils on their work" (DfES, 2001a: p. 19).

The fix for the low levels of aspiration toward further and higher education is to promote the notion of an individualised approach to the 14-19 curriculum so as to meet the needs of individual "talents and aspirations". By creating a greater choice of options at the age of 14 through additional "worthwhile" qualifications being offered, the government infers that the result will be an increase in the number of young people taking part in education and training post 16 and more people proceeding into higher education (DfES, 2001a). We are left to ponder what a "worthwhile" qualification might be and to wonder too, how individual 'talents and aspirations' might match or clash with the notion of a 'high skills' economy. It is worth noting here too, that while choice and diversity are rhetorically catered for within the policy document, suggesting freedom for individuals, so too is the

control terminology of 'basics' for while 14-19 year olds are supposedly to gain a greater variety of choice of areas of study, so too are they to be standardised in the 'basics'.

### **Policy, lifelong learning and dispositions**

A number of assumptions underlie the policy-makers' perceptions but not everyone concurs with the policy-makers' views. Firstly policy-makers portray learning as a national imperative (Edwards and Nicholl, 2001). As will be shown in Chapter 4, the government emphasises the discourse of economism even while proclaiming a dual role for education: that of the personal developer on the one hand and the social and economic developer on the other. As to the latter, the government appears to try to blend both the traditional, some might argue elite, version of the 'basic' knowledge and skills that all need to know with the liberal progressives notion of the needs of modern global capitalist economies (Wells et al, 1998). Thus the inference seems to be that learning is both about the transmission of traditional skills and knowledge and it is about the active development of creativity, problem-solving and reasoning skills. However, it is argued that lifelong learning embedded in the notion of economic development and inferred as compulsory, such as is the case in the contemporary cultural context of advanced capitalism (Bagnall, 2001), is in danger of losing "it's individual, emotional and delightful elements" (Tight, 1998a: p. 262). Individuals pursuing learning for their own self-fulfilment may become marginalised (Hughes and Tight, 1995) as learning becomes re-labelled as work (Tight, 1998a). The narrow focus of governmental reports and policy on vocational education and training, although mentioning other aspects of learning such as citizenship and community (Ecclestone, 1999), moves always to the assumed needs of employers and the accreditation of learning (Tight, 1998b).

Secondly, the government believes that part of the problem of the 'achievement gap' is low motivation and poor attitudes towards study. They purport that intrinsic motivation can be transmitted from teacher to pupil but they rely heavily on the use of tests and targets, naming and shaming to improve achievement. This makes the assumption that people can be driven to learn, or at least be driven to transmit learning, for the tests are as



much a measure of the teacher as they are the pupil. But there is also the inference that through the use of summative tests people will become more skilled. It is assumed that tests and assessments are a useful source of motivation, but Broadfoot (1996) alerts us to another perspective: that for those who find it hardest to achieve in examinations such procedures may well only serve to further ensure these students learn the futility of effort and become increasingly demotivated. The heavy emphasis on measurable performance is, it is suggested, in tension with the rhetoric of policy makers (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000) who claim to want to foster “an enquiring mind and the love of learning” (DfEE, 1998). Learning which focuses largely on the needs of assessment, with a heavy reliance on the gaining of factual knowledge and little emphasis on understanding may not foster the “learning habit”(IPPR, 1993) that policy makers claim they want individuals to acquire (DfEE, 1998). There is evidence to show that far from aiding the development of positive dispositions to lifelong learning, the “high-stakes assessment” culture that is dominant in current primary education policy may unintentionally undermine any such development (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000; Pollard and Triggs, 2000).

If we want a greater proportion of our population to gain higher skills and education for a ‘high skills’ economy then it may be that there is a:

“... need to ‘warm up’ potential students to carry on learning rather than ‘cool out’ the majority.” (Broadfoot, 1996: p. 36)

This may require the fostering of a disposition to learn, where intrinsic reward plays a significant part in the motivation of learners instead of, or as well as, providing extrinsic benefits and penalties to entice learners to seek out opportunities to learn.

At age 14, the government appears to move away from the assumption that young people are passive individuals to be treated to a cocktail of ‘what is good for them’. There is a move toward viewing the pupil as a rational decision-maker who will be motivated best by following educational routes that are of personal value and interest to the student. The state’s role is to ensure that there are choices of pathways open to the individual to meet

different talents, interests and aspirations. Pupils, according to this view will be motivated by the thought of the extrinsic reward of achieving particular career aspirations, based on 'abilities' or 'talents'. This raises the issue of the assumptions made by the government about 'ability', 'talent' or 'intelligence'. The belief that all students are able to improve is crucial if a 'high skills', high wage economy is to be achieved. But terms used in policy documentation, while at once advocating the ability of all students to achieve, also singles out pupils with special learning needs and those who are 'gifted' and 'talented'. Although setting and banding are no longer mentioned in the recent White Paper, 'Achieving Success', earlier policy documents made clear the need to differentiate pupils by 'ability'. Testing, even under the auspices of accountability, has a spin off of categorising pupils; judging them, marking them and putting them in their ability positions. Those who do not 'achieve' must be given 'catch-up' lessons. By fourteen it is assumed that pupils will know their 'talents', have aspirations and opt for courses that best lead them to 'achieve'.

Finally, the government recognises there is an achievement gap "between children who have parents with a manual occupation and those who come from a non-manual background" (DfES, 2001a: p. 14). However, they do not believe that background should be used as an excuse for poor performance (Barber, 1998, 2000; Blunkett, 1999). After all, education does enable some working class individuals to attain social mobility in the labour market (Mac an Ghaill, 1996). But this is not to deny the power of class "because it can't explain everything" (Thrupp, 1999). Rather it is to acknowledge a need to look at within as well as between class differences, at the rich variations of social, cultural and economic resources that individuals have access to, may learn from and certainly interact with.

In summary, education policy tends to privilege the purpose of education as being for economic wellbeing of the nation. While mentioning learning as an active, meaning-making activity, the emphasis suggests a concept of learning closely allied to one of accumulation of facts and memorisation. Although policy rhetoric claims a desire to foster a love of learning, it is extrinsic reward and punishment that dominates policy text. Policy-makers claim to want all members of the community to believe they have the

ability to improve their learning, yet they also infer that individuals - whether at pupil, teacher, class, school or local authority level - will have different levels of ability, that must be paraded by such means as setting, and league tables. Pupils, it is assumed will have aspirations and interests and these, along with their 'talents' will be used to select future pathways. Little account is taken of the different socio-economic backgrounds and the effect these may have on pupil perceptions of what is possible.

It can be seen that different meanings and interpretations are constructed by different individuals in the way they make sense of 'lifelong learning', the dispositions for lifelong learning and the means by which the conditions are created to promote the dispositions to lifelong learning. These differences broadly fit the two contrastive models of education outlined by Pollard and Triggs (2000) and based on the work of Bernstein: that of "performance education" (and privileged by contemporary policy-makers) and an alternative of "competence education". We now need to introduce the concept of students' frames of reference (FORs) as a way of understanding how they can be used to judge whether the government's educational policy and related practice is likely to foster dispositions to lifelong learning.

Given the many concepts of lifelong learning described above, the difficulty is to find a way of being able to judge whether specific government policies are likely to foster lifelong learning. One way of trying to do this is to ask what key aspects of a child's learning that schools can influence are common to all the many rhetorical approaches and lists of desirable characteristics found in the literature. One answer is to focus on pupils' concepts of learning (purpose, importance and 'nature' of learning), motivation, view of their ability and aspirations. Arguably, dispositions for lifelong learning will only develop at school if students understand the importance and something of the way they learn best, are highly motivated, have a view that their ability will not limit their learning and have aspirations in relation to specific goals that entail learning. Indeed, it would be hard not to argue that pupils' views of learning, motivation, perceptions of ability and aspirations are central to the dispositions individuals have toward learning and that they therefore form a basis for lifelong learning. It will be argued that these four factors form the basis for

students' frames of reference (FORs) as regards what they learn, why they learnt it and what sense of progress in learning that they might have. While there may be other foundational factors influencing lifelong learning it will be these that will be used in the thesis to assess the impact of schooling on students' FORs. FORs are therefore a way of generating insights into what needs to be developed as a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

### **Dispositions and Frames of Reference**

Dispositions are tendencies to respond to situations in particular ways based on the meanings learners make of their experiences (Allal, 2002; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). It assumes that dispositions are, at least in part, learned and modified through the social contexts learners find themselves in. This is broadly in line with the perspective of symbolic interactionists who theorise that individuals make sense of their worlds and act accordingly through social interaction with others in conjunction with the way in which the individual defines a given situation internally (Charon, 1989). As Daniels (1996) explains:

“The social does not become individual by a process of simple transmission. Individuals construct their own sense from socially available meanings” (p. 10).

One way of understanding how this is done is through the concept of folk theories or models (Shore, 1996). According to Shore (1996) individuals' construct 'folk models' or 'private theories' (Kinach, 1996) that help them 'make sense' of their worlds. FORs provide a structure by which to interpret and understand the “folk models” (Shore, 1996) or “private theories” (Kinach, 1996) learners hold about each of the individual dispositions to learn as well as the ways in which these views may draw upon and influence each other. FORs refer to the “deep structures of mentality” (Nash, 1998) and the personal theories that provide the scope and constraints of the perspectives from which individuals are able to see their world and which help them “define a given situation internally” (Charon, 1989). Where a disposition is the tendency to act, FORs are used to denote the

frameworks and assumptions that underpin the thinking, actions and dispositions of individuals.

In constructing their own sense, the work of Bourdieu reminds us of the importance of position and the social structures that may help to form and reform dispositions as Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) point out. The assumption is that FORs arise from an amalgam of social interaction (interpersonal), individual interpretation (intra-individual) and the socio-cultural-historic (position) (Pollard with Filer, 1996; Wertsch, 1991) of the individual.

As I have shown, the four foundational factors to be explored in this study appear particularly pertinent to current education policy, but why do I claim that these factors are important?

### *Concepts of learning*

How people think about what 'learning' means can vary considerably, from learning as the passive acquisition of facts and knowledge to the active construction of knowledge and understanding. West (1988) suggests that repeating teachers' knowledge or textbook knowledge is not 'learning'. For West, as for Rogers and Freiberg (1994) 'real' 'learning' involves the construction of a personal understanding, a comprehension of what is needed, the making sense of other people's understandings. Others suggest that rote learning, that is 'learning without meaning' (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) is learning of a kind (Barrow and Woods, 1988). It has been suggested that GCSE examinations privilege the measurement of 'learning' through the reproduction of 'learned' - that is memorised - information (Wilding et al, 1999). National assessments at the end of each Key Stage, although currently being revised, purportedly to attempt to measure 'understanding' rather than memory, may also privilege a particular concept of learning. The way that learning is assessed may have much to do with the frame of reference being used as to the role of assessment. Broadfoot (1998) suggests that there are incompatible purposes: that of providing an effective accreditation system and that of supporting and encouraging

learning. The former links to a frame of reference that sees the purpose of the education system in terms of sorting and selecting the potential workforce into their allotted socio-economic places. The latter seeks to promote individual empowerment, creativity and independent life. It is suggested that the form of assessment that is privileged results in a 'wash-back' effect that determines the nature of curriculum and pedagogy (Broadfoot, 1996) that learners are subjected to.

Learners themselves may come to recognise that only particular kinds of achievement are valued (Broadfoot, 1996). Do they also learn to hold a FOR that assumes learning to be about the memorisation of information that can be reproduced later rather than learning as a process to help them make sense of, interpret and understand their world? And does it matter? It might if we believe that there is going to be a growing need for an increasing number of the working populace with 'higher level' skills of construction, creativity, problem-solving and the ability to transfer understanding to novel situations rather than the low level skills of basic skills, fact retention and reproduction. It might also matter in terms of motivation.

### *Motivation*

A learner who views learning as the gathering and memorisation of facts for later reproduction in order to gain a credential that they require, or think they do, for the acquisition of a particular job may be motivated to learn only that which is required to achieve the goal. A learner framing learning as a means of better understanding or making sense of their world, or of quenching their curiosity are, it might be assumed, more likely to be driven to actively seek out learning opportunities. This notion ties in with a body of research, notably that of Dweck (1986; 2000) and Covington (1998) exploring achievement motivation and the potential effects different implicit theories and goals for learning held by learners, are likely to have on students' motivations to learn. Those with a frame of reference of achieving a favourable judgement of competence may, it is claimed respond quite differently to learning to those wanting to actually increase competence and understand something new. Dweck also believes learners hold different theories about

intelligence. Some see intelligence as fixed so that no matter how much effort they put in to achieving some aspect of learning, if they are not innately endowed with the necessary abilities, they will believe themselves unable to succeed. Those believing intelligence to be malleable are more likely to maintain effort as their frame of reference allows for improvements to be made. If learners' views of learning are scaffolded by a frame that allows them to assume they are able to affect their learning outcomes by their own actions, that is if their notions of their self-efficacy is high (Bandura, 1995), they are more likely to continue to persevere even in the face of difficulty than learners who believe their success or failure is beyond their control.

### *Ability*

The FORs that structure learners views of their abilities to learn may affect the amount of effort a learner is prepared to expend on a learning activity and thus their motivation to try.

This is important because it seems unlikely that a learner who assumes fixed intelligence and who receives poor feedback and judgements about their learning will gain any intrinsic reward from learning. They are therefore likely to require extrinsic rewards and punishments to push them toward learning but the level and type of extrinsic reward that may be effective is unlikely to be the reward of the thought of gaining credentials that the learner believes is beyond their reach. If we believe that there is need for more people to be motivated to continue learning for longer, and here 'learning' refers especially to the formal and non-formal in particular, we need to better understand how students view their motivations to learn. We need also to understand better the underpinning theories or frames of reference that learners hold, that will shape their thinking about ability and how these may help to form their views about what motivates them to learn. Students' motivation to learn may be affected by their aspirations for their future socio-economic positions and this forms another part of their FORs.

## *Aspirations*

“If students . . . believe that they have learned all they need to be the adults they want to be, then they cannot be expected to find further time at school of much use.” (Nash, 1998: p. 76)

Nash alerts us to the importance of understanding not only who students think they are but also who they want to become and how this may affect their views on learning and especially their views on the motivation to learn. Brown (1987), as shall be more fully explained in Chapter 2, constructed three possible frames of reference for aspirations, used by working class boys in the 1980s. Working class boys who wanted to ‘get in’ to the working class were likely to view schooling with derision for their frame of reference was one that believed education to be a waste of time, and was not required for their ultimate destination. Boys wanting to ‘get on’ in the working class were motivated to put in the minimum effort required to gain the credentials to achieve this. Only the boys wanting to ‘get out’ of their class appeared to put in more effort than was regarded as reasonable by other working class boys, and may even have gained some intrinsic reward in doing so. Brown points out that as employment practices change, so too might the frames of reference adopted by young learners. If we believe, as policy-makers inform us, that there is no longer a requirement for large numbers of low achieving pupils to be mopped up in low skill employment; if more young people should aspire to university and be motivated to continue learning throughout life (DfES, 2001a), it is important to understand the frames of reference in terms of aspirations that young learners hold.

## **Purpose, Aims and Scope of Study**

Through the investigation of the following questions, this study investigates to what extent education policy, as translated into practice, helps or hinders the creation of the conditions needed for a positive approach to lifelong learning:



- To what extent do students' FORs and elements of the FORs eg motivation, perceptions of ability and aspirations, change as a result of schooling? In particular, does schooling foster students' FORs in ways that will develop appropriate dispositions for lifelong learning?

In order to address this question there are a series of related questions that need to be raised.

- What FORs do students have in terms of motivation, ability and aspirations across contexts and across time?
- How do students' make sense of relationships between FORs?
- How do students' understand 'learning' across contexts within and without school and across time?
- Are there other factors, outside school, which might influence students' FORs?

In order to understand how the experience of schooling may foster students' FORs in particular ways it is necessary to understand the interpretations students make about each of the component parts of the FORs. So it is necessary to understand how pupils' make sense of 'motivation' 'ability' and 'aspirations' as well as what they understand 'learning' to be. But it is not sufficient to consider each of these in isolation. It is also necessary to understand how one component may provide scope and limitations to other component parts. For instance, if pupils believe that learning is primarily required in order to gain qualifications to be traded for a job they aspire to, there need not be a problem in terms of developing a positive approach to lifelong learning if certain other FORs are also held by the individual. So, for example, if they believe that they are intrinsically interested in understanding the knowledge required for the qualifications; that they are motivated by the intrinsic reward they gain from understanding more, mastering the knowledge domain or skill; and that they believe they have the 'ability' to learn to master the skill or knowledge. There may be a problem if their aspirations for future employment are such that they assume they already 'know' enough and need to know no more; if they believe that they are innately unable to make the necessary progress; or if they believe that 'learning' stops

when acquired facts and skills have been tested and accredited - perhaps not only stops, but may also be forgotten.

The study focuses on Key Stage 3, that is, secondary education for 11-14 year olds. Data were gathered from pupils in the south of England with a range of socio-economic resources available to them. Students were also selected across the range of prior achievement as measured by cognitive ability and national 'Key Stage' tests. Through the conduct of a longitudinal survey by interview data were collected regarding pupils' perceptions of concepts of learning, motivation, ability and aspirations.

### **Summary of Chapter and Structure of the Thesis**

In this chapter I have introduced a discussion of lifelong learning and the problematic nature of defining ideal dispositions to lifelong learning. I have suggested that there are foundational factors that constitute a basis for lifelong learning and that individual's hold differing 'frames of reference' regarding these factors and the relationships between them. Policy makers at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century privilege a 'performance' model of education but this is not the only model that is available. It was suggested earlier that there is an alternative model, that of 'competence', that may provide a better understanding of the dispositions that need to be fostered in school to encourage lifelong learning. Importantly because the latter rests on different assumptions about motivation, aspirations, views of ability and learning, the FORs required to help foster lifelong learning will be different. This thesis explores the assumptions that underpin current government policy on education in England, about factors, understood in terms of FORs that may affect learning. It compares these with the perceptions pupils have about the factors and seeks to understand more fully the relationship between current government policy assumptions and the views of learners at whom the policy is directed.

In Chapter 2 I develop the theoretical framework of the study through a review of the literature and show how it has influenced the construction of the research questions. Chapter 3 explores in more detail the assumptions about the FORs that underpin the

‘performance model’ of contemporary education policy and discuss, in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the alternative FORs presupposed by the ‘competence’ model. Highlighting an alternative model of education is important for purposes of critique because it helps to throw the assumptions underlying the performance model into sharp relief and points to alternative policies. In Chapter 4 I describe the design of the empirical study and consider a number of methodological issues relating to this. These four chapters form the first part of the thesis, outlining and developing the theoretical framework and detailing the research design and methodology.

Chapters 5 - 11 describe and analyse the empirical data. Chapter 5 introduces the students who took part in the research, providing the learners with identities as well as considering the learning identities contained within their stories. In Chapter 6, drawing on the works of Bourdieu and Coleman, I map out the myriad of different resources young people carry with them from beyond formal education, resources that are instrumental in helping shape the individual identities, their hopes and aspirations, their dispositions and their motivations. This provides an overview of the contexts and experiences that provide the scope for the development of individual ‘frames of reference’. Chapter 7 asks how important learning is to young people, what they see as the purpose of learning and the concepts they hold of learning, whether in or out of school. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 explore motivation, ability and aspirations respectively. What might pupils’ stories tell us of what motivates them and what makes them reticent to learn? Some of the complexities of motivation are illuminated in Chapter 8. The governments’ use of tests and targets, naming and shaming to improve achievement makes the assumption that people can be driven to learn, or at least be driven to transmit learning, for the tests are as much a measure of the teacher as they are the pupil. But there is also the inference that through the use of summative tests people will become more skilled. What do young people think they learn by taking tests? Are they aware of other forms of assessment and if so, how do they perceive these in relation to learning. Pupil views on assessments are explored in Chapter 9. By fourteen it is assumed that pupils will know their ‘talents’, have aspirations and opt for courses that best lead them to ‘achieve’. I wanted to know how far this assumption is borne out in the minds of fourteen-year-olds. In Chapter 10 my findings are

reported. But the strand of ability weaves its way through a range of chapters, through learner identity in Chapter 5, in Chapter 7 on the importance of learning, through assumed links between perceived ability and motivation in Chapter 8 and in ability formation through assessment in 9. Halsey (1992) believes that economics has become a form of new religion which:

“... tries to establish order in the world by producing experts who can add up the joys and the sorrow of all our experience.” (p. 13)

He claims that there is a type of league table running internationally that is trying to gain a better and better life. But, he argues, not all things in life can be measured in an economic way. Chapter 11 considers what we miss when we talk only of ‘levels’ of achievement and not of person(s). Like each of the chapters before it, it looks beyond the measurable; takes us from the simple into the complex; from the economic into the personal.

The final part of the thesis concludes, in Chapter 12, by returning to provide a summarised response to each of the research questions before drawing together these responses to reach a conclusion as to the extent education policy, as translated into practice, helps or hinders the creation of the conditions for a ‘competence’ approach to lifelong learning. Finally, reflecting on what the study has revealed, I consider what remains concealed and directions for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Developing a theoretical framework: review of literature and the structuring of ‘orienting theories’**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 1 I identified four factors from educational research that influence ‘lifelong learning’: concepts of learning, motivation, ability and aspirations. In this chapter I review the research literature and use the review to develop a deeper understanding of the ‘frames of reference’ (FORs).

Learning can be structured broadly in terms of the three domains of learning outlined by Pollard with Filer (1996) and the relationships that they argue exist between the domains. They suggest that learning occurs through social interaction (interpersonal), individual interpretation (intra-individual) and the socio-cultural-historic (position) (Pollard with Filer, 1996; Wertsch, 1991) of the individual. Learners gain a ‘knowledge’ of the “normative frameworks and assumptions for ‘making sense’” (Pollard with Filer, 1996: p. 7) of their worlds, mediated by individual cognitive capacities, from their socio-cultural-historic contexts. The socio-cultural-historic positions are themselves mediated by the social practices that the individual experiences and meaning is generated from these social interactions. The meanings generated from social interaction are, in turn, mediated by the intra-individual meanings that the learner brings with them to the social contexts they experience.

This model of learning draws together the “arbitrary disciplinary boundaries” (Nash 1999d) of psychology and sociology, providing as it does for the integration of theories derived from psychology and sociology. In reviewing the literature that has influenced this study, I use this model of learning as a heuristic for identifying the scope and limitations of a number of theoretical positions.

## **Concepts of learning**

Psychologists concentrate on the intra-individual domain of learning. Within this domain Hartley (1998) describes three philosophical positions in relation to the principle of learning. These are described similarly by Riding and Rayner (1998) as the three elements of personal psychology: behaviour (that is, doing); cognition (that is, knowing); and affect (that is, feeling). Behaviourists believe learning occurs through the acquisition of habits gained from responses from external events. This philosophical principle of learning advocates learning by rote and views the learner as a passive recipient of knowledge. It adopts the transmission model of communication (Wertsch, 1991) which assumes that the message transmitted is the same as the message received.

Cognitivists believe learning occurs through internal events. The learner makes connections and inferences, using plans and strategies to learn “with understanding” (Hartley (1998). Cognitive psychologists try to establish how individuals go about gathering information from their environment, how they mentally organise it and make personal sense of it and how they then apply this knowledge (Jonassen and Grabowski, 1993). Some cognitive psychologists focus on learning styles while others concentrate on the development of schemata (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). The former assume individuals have preferences for particular learning styles or ways of gathering, organising and using information which arise from their relatively stable cognitive styles and the learning strategies that the individual builds up to mediate between their cognitive style and the tasks they have to do (Riding and Rayner, 1998; Jonassen and Grabowski, 1993). How stable the cognitive styles are, is debatable (Hayes and Allinson, 1996). Style may be affected by context (Jonassen and Grabowski, 1993), culture, experience, motivation and gender (Riding, 1997) and may vary over the life span (Jonassen and Grabowski, 1993; Rebok, 1987). Nevertheless, the work of cognitive psychologists who concentrate on learning styles, while providing theories on the intra-individual domain, leave much unsaid as to the relationship of this domain with that of others in the process of learning.

Cognitivists adopting the constructivist theory of learning assume that there is a continuous process of construction of meaning. The learner makes sense of new inputs by creating links with their prior knowledge (Bennett and Dunne, 1994). In the constructivist theory of learning the individual makes their “own sense of other people’s understanding of the world” (West, (1988). Thus, in this model of learning the message transmitted transmutes as the receiver puts their own meaning into the message received (Wertsch, 1991). Social constructivist psychologists try to explain what happens intra-individually in order that individuals make sense of the socio-cultural-historic frameworks and the social interactions they experience. They explore the relationships between domains but have less to say about the structure of the social domains themselves.

Those who hold a social or phenomenological position believe learning to be about the understanding of our thoughts, feelings, needs and intentions and those of others. Learning is about the development of knowledge about the self, social roles and relations between people (Rebok, 1987). It can be described as knowledge through living where feelings, emotions and experience play important roles in learning (Hartley, 1998). Some social psychologists explore the affective with the cognitive providing insights into the potential inter-relatedness of these domains (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Vermunt, 1996; Severiens and ten Dam, 1997; Watts and Alsop, 1997) sometimes abstractly and sometimes in relation to particular contexts. Other social psychologists explore specifically aspects of learning concerned with the learner’s welfare. Greenhalgh (1994), for example, considers how learning might be improved by actions taken to reduce the anxiety of the pupil. Theories developed by social psychologists are especially useful in helping us to make sense of the intra-individual domain, sometimes also providing insights into the possible relationships with the social. They do not, however, provide us with an understanding of the interrelationships with the broader socio-cultural-historic domain, for which the work of sociologists comes to the fore. The role of the socio-cultural-historic domain will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Before moving on to motivation, another category of literature on learning needs to be addressed. This attempts to categorise, and sometimes judge, concepts of learning across the three philosophical positions relating to the principles of learning.

In Chapter 1 I suggested that there is considerable variation in the way people think about what it means to learn, ranging from the passive acquisition of facts and knowledge to the active construction of knowledge and understanding. This variation can be seen in the literature, from the behaviourists, with their advocacy of learning by rote, through the cognitivists with their emphasis on understanding, to the social psychologists who regard learning as involving the “whole person” including not only cognitive but also affective dimensions and who view the learner as an active meaning maker (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). In similar vein, two contrasting approaches to learning, ‘surface’ and ‘deep’, have been identified (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Ramsden, 1988). A ‘surface’ approach to learning has as an intention the completion of a task requirement. It includes focusing on the signs and text, on discreet elements; information is memorised for assessment which is separate from ‘real life’; and there is unreflective association of concepts and facts. In contrast, a ‘deep’ approach to learning has as the intention, understanding. The focus is on ‘what is meant’; new learning relates to previous knowledge; concepts relate to everyday experience so that ‘reality’ becomes more visible and more intelligible. A ‘deep’ approach to learning approximates to that of the constructivist theories of learning. West (1988), a constructivist, shuns the behaviourist principle, believing that repeating teachers’ knowledge or textbook knowledge is not learning but such knowledge is seen by others as learning “of a kind” (Barrow and Woods, 1988). For Ramsden (1988) it is less about which forms of learning exist than about which is the “superior” form, for him this being ‘deep’ learning.

A more elaborate categorisation of possible conceptions of learning is offered by Saljo (1979, cited in Hartley, 1998). Saljo’s work is particularly relevant here as it provides an initial framework of concepts of learning that encompass the notion of learning as the passive transmission of knowledge and skills through to that of active meaning-making within particular social contexts and thus incorporates ways of learning across the three



psychological principles. It envelops 'surface' and 'deep' approaches to learning (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Ramsden, 1988).

However, Saljo's conceptual framework is not a taxonomy of learning, with developmental stages. Conceptions of learning, like conceptions of 'reality' may differ depending on the situation or context (Saljo, 1988) the learner is in at the time.

Saljo's five concepts of learning may be summarised as:

1. Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge which involves acquiring 'information' or 'knowing a lot';
2. Learning as memorising, that is storing information that is later reproduced;
3. Learning as acquiring facts, skills and methods, thus remembering knowledge and procedures that are going to be useful at a later date;
4. Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning. Here learning is seen as a process, where learning is a constructive activity;
5. Learning as a process that helps us to interpret and understand reality, involving comprehending the world by reinterpreting information and knowledge in the light of one's own experience and value.

Concepts 1-3 all adopt a transmission model of learning where the message or skill is transmitted by a sender, the knowledgeable other, be that a teacher, parent, media presenter or textbook and where the receiver, the learner, receives the message in its original state. Concepts 4 and 5 assume that the message is in some way 'worked on' by the learner and therefore the meaning or interpretation of the message will be reconstructed by the learner who is active in the process of learning.

It is Saljo's conceptual framework of learning that has been used as a heuristic device to analyse the 'frames of reference' pupils' hold in regard to concepts of learning, in Chapter 7. However, although Saljo's work does infer the interpersonal and the socio-cultural

domains in Concept 5 it does not directly focus on these aspects and as such remains firmly in the discipline of psychology.

## **Motivation**

As Claxton (1988) comments, the plethora of texts on the concept of motivation relating to learning, can be confusing, not least because of the interchangeable uses that are made of terms such as 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' motivation. For example Claxton believes, like Smith and Spurling (2001) that all motivation is 'intrinsic' in so much as it is a "product of a private mental process". With this view, no one is able to motivate another individual for although a stimulus can be offered, the reaction is personal (Stoll and Fink, 1996). This can be contrasted with the behaviourists view of motivation which assumes the need for sticks and carrots in order that people act as others want them to (Smith and Spurling, 2001), that is by the use of positive and negative reinforcement (Hartley, 1998).

Others understand 'intrinsic' motivation as an activity 'done for it's own sake' (Covington, 1998), thus Whitehead (1994) regards intrinsic motivation as occurring because a task arouses curiosity, perhaps as a result of links to past experiences, and because there is an interest in knowledge 'for it's own sake'. Claxton suggests that this definition of 'intrinsic motivation' might better be termed 'intrinsic reward'. Intrinsic motivation is linked to concepts of learning through the work of Entwistle (Keys and Fernandes, 1993), suggesting that intrinsic motivation is linked to 'deep' learning for understanding, whereas extrinsic motivation, for instance by being motivated to get good grades, is associated with 'surface' learning.

Whitehead (1994) divides extrinsic motivation into two forms. Firstly, individuals may be motivated to gain recognition of achievement by others, perhaps in the form of attaining a high-status job, or competing for a 'favourable' position. Secondly, people may be motivated extrinsically by the desire for a highly paid job or good exam grades. In both forms of extrinsic motivation, activity is undertaken for a reward other than the 'learning' resulting from the activity itself.

Another view of motivation, with regard to learning, is that of 'achievement'. According to Vidler (1979), achievement motivation refers to actions taken to achieve "internalised standards of excellence" rather than the achievement of power or friendships and it does not necessarily mean the attainment of high test scores, social position or high salary. Covington (1998) describes these latter forms of attainment as 'drives', whereas the former, that Covington refers to as 'goals', result in action as individuals strive for self-satisfaction through the "fulfilment of valued goals" (Bandura, 1995). When the individual does not achieve the goal, additional effort will be intensified. However, Bandura goes on to point out that students' beliefs in their capability to achieve a given goal will affect the actions they take.

Dweck, (1986; 2000) develops a complimentary explanation of achievement motivation. As part of her experimental studies into motivation Dweck contends that people hold either an 'entity theory' of intelligence, that is they see intelligence as fixed, or they hold an 'incremental theory' (intelligence is malleable). Dweck seeks to persuade that in order to retain the motivation to learn conditions need to be created that encourage an incremental view of intelligence. She argues that if the individual believes that intelligence is fixed and that s/he is incompetent then 'learned helplessness' will follow as the individual gives up trying to improve believing this to be impossible. However, Gipps and Tunstall (1998) remind us that there may be a social element involved too, for those who try hard may receive very different responses from teachers to those who use little effort no matter what their ability.

Dweck also proposes that there needs to be a move away from 'performance goals', that is aims to gain favourable judgement of competence or to avoid negative judgements, to 'learning goals': aiming to increase competence, to understand or master something new (Dweck, 1986) and thus "becoming more effective as a person" (Covington, 1998). Individuals holding performance goals may view effort as a sign of a lack of ability and would be inclined to view mastery with low effort as "relieved" or "proud" of. Those with learning goals would see obstacles as a challenge, viewing mastery without effort as

“boring” or “disappointing”. These ideas will be returned to a little later, when the ‘frames of reference’ with regard to ability are considered.

While some researchers seek to understand achievement goals as motivators, another area of study explores goals from the perspective that the “ultimate motivator” is to be participating in “activities we love” (Goleman, 2000). This begins from Aristotles’ premise that the ultimate human goal is to seek happiness and other goals are only valued because it is thought they will result in happiness. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) claims that happiness is not a result of chance or good fortune but is cultivated by individuals. Those learning to control their inner experience are able to determine the quality of their lives which it is claimed is as close as possible to a definition of happiness. When the individual feels in control of his/her own actions, rather than being in the hands of fate, Csikszentmihalyi claims there is a feeling of exhilaration and a deep sense of enjoyment. This does not occur in time of relaxation, but when we make something happen. To gain this feeling of control the individual needs to achieve realistic goals, assuming that the individuals’ skills match the opportunity for action. When the experience is so enjoyable that people will do it no matter the cost, but rather just for the sake of doing it, they enter a state of “flow”. But:

“Often children - and adults - need external incentives to take the first steps in an activity that requires a difficult restructuring of attention. Most enjoyable activities are not natural; they demand an effort that initially one is reluctant to make. But once the interaction starts to provide feedback to the person’s skills, it usually begins to be intrinsically rewarding.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: p. 68)

He goes on to point out the difficult balance between positive encouragement and enforcement, the latter often resulting in a dislike of activities forever. Achieving flow can be made more difficult when there is information being given to the individual that conflicts with the attainment of the goal, for instance pain, fear, rage, anxiety or jealousy. Again we see motivation as both ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ but we are reminded by the works of Goleman (2000) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) of the possibility that emotions play a significant part in the ways individuals are motivated.

In considering the concept of motivation, one further aspect should not be overlooked. That is the contextual or situational nature of motivation. Csikszentmihalyi (1990), like Gardner et al (1996), suggest that there will be times when even apparently 'intrinsically' motivated people will require 'extrinsic' reward to spur them into action. Gipps and Tunstall (1998), as we have seen alert us to the interpersonal aspect of motivation. How others respond to particular actions of the individual is, at least in the socio-cultural theory of learning, likely to impact on the meanings that are made of the effectiveness of an action. The social context of motivation is illuminated well by McDermott (1993).

McDermott was not so concerned with motivation as with attempting to discover examples of mental activity in 'natural' environments. But what ultimately captured his and his co-researchers attention were the actions and reactions of Adam, a 'Learning Disabled' child. Although labelled 'LD' Adam, we are told, "seemed always eager to try." At first reading we might assume Adam to be motivated toward learning. Yet as the story unfolds we find that his actions and reactions to the social situations he finds himself in, form and reform as an amoebic process. In everyday life he presents less as a child with a problem, only as he moves along a continuum to ever increasing formal learning situations does he become conspicuous in his weaknesses. Only then is he required to take action to protect himself, and only when the actions of others have reacted with his own actions to create the need for reaction of a type in him. In other words, learning, 'intelligence' and motivation might be social and it might be complex.

## **Ability**

In the last section it was shown that there is a body of knowledge that explores the possibility that the 'frames of reference' held by individuals about their capability to carry out actions to achieve goals (Bandura, 1995); about the type of goals aimed for (Dweck, 1986, 2000; Covington, 1998); and about the stability of intelligence (Dweck, 1986; 2000), may influence their motivation to learn. I return to this notion here by firstly

considering some of the literature that provides theories about intelligence before moving on to the notion of ability and how it is assessed.

### *Intelligence*

Dweck (1986; 2000), as stated above, describes two contrasting theories of intelligence: entity theory that regards intelligence as 'fixed' and incremental theory that views intelligence as malleable; the dominant common-sense view seeming to be one of fixed intelligence (Pollard and Triggs, 2000). Dweck's work is based on the study of children's views of intelligence, but researchers' views of intelligence may also be divided in this way. Some assume intelligence to be a natural, inherent part of the individual, fixed at birth, while others believe that intelligence can be nurtured, altered and developed. Others adopt a stance that assumes some combination of the two extremes, while yet others believe there is not enough data available to be able to judge (Snyderman and Rothman, 1987). Gardner et al (1996) provides an overview of the debates between the various viewpoints on intelligence.

'Common-sense' decrees that people do vary in their performance in activities whether we want to call these variations 'intelligences' or 'talents' as Gardner et al (1996) argue or 'abilities'.

"... it has now been established quite convincingly that individuals have quite different minds from one another..." (Gardner, 1993: p.71)

Gardner (1993) believes that part of these differences may be genetic but even if this is so he believes all human beings are capable of using all 'intelligences' (Gardner et al, 1996). Individuals will have particular strengths and weaknesses but what they are ultimately able to achieve will in part depend on interactions with environmental factors so that:

"... individuals may differ in the particular intelligence profiles with which they are born... certainly they differ in the profiles they end up with" (Gardner, 1993: p. 9)

Whether intelligence is an innate, fixed potential of “predetermined size” (Moon, 1999) or developmental are often seen as opposing views yet it may be that they are all part of the jigsaw (Andrade and Perkins, 1998). How individual learners perceive notions of ‘intelligence’, whether fixed (entity) or variable (incremental) (Dweck, 1986; 2000) and ‘competence’ (Phillips and Zimmerman, 1990) is of particular interest in this thesis, for it is suggested that such perceptions may be more influential in determining motivation and achievement than actual ability (Phillips and Zimmerman, 1990).

Each theory has its use in helping us to make sense of the complex psychological construct of intelligence (Riding and Rayner, 1998). Those believing that there is a neural explanation for the differences in individual’s apparent ability to learn such as Jensen (1998) alert us to the possibility that at least part of the way we are is biological in its origins. But it does not help us explain or understand why people performing at similar levels on psychometric tests end up in very different positions in life (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), nor why some of those doing poorly on an IQ test manage to succeed in everyday life. It does not help us if we think about the changing arguments of girls underperforming then outperforming boys, then underperforming on another set of tests (Henry, 2002). It doesn’t help us understand abilities in any other field than the ‘scholastic’. On this point it should be said, in the name of justice that Jensen claims that there is evidence to show that general intelligence, measured by IQ tests, is reflected beyond the academic world, in many aspects of everyday life. Gardner (1993), while not dismissing the possibility of intelligence being bounded by genetic factors, argues that there are studies that show many capable experts having ‘failed’ on formal measures of calculating and reasoning capacities and concludes that even if there is an intelligence ‘g’ it is only important in school life.

Whether we want to accept Gardner’s proposition that there are at least eight forms of intelligence (Gardner, 1999), his ‘individualisation of intelligence’ (Gardner, 1993) is at least helpful in highlighting that there may be more to intelligence than the scholastic and the neural. Here Gardner suggests that every person’s mind is different to every other in differing intelligences due to peculiar socio-cultural contexts; and individual human and non-human extensions of the mind. While the first point introduces the possibility of

addressing the work of the sociologist, the second point is interesting in that it refers to Gardner's observation of the real world that, when thinking about the distribution of intelligence, the individual does not only use the intelligence of his/her mind but introduces the use of tools such as notebooks, computers, techniques and the skills and intelligences of others.

One further work on intelligence has influenced my thinking, the work of Sternberg (1990a; 1998). His Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence suggests that individuals possess, to varying degrees, three forms of abilities: analytical (analyse, judge, evaluate, compare, contrast); creative (create, invent, discover, imagine, suppose); practical (apply, put into practice, implement, use). Individuals may have preferred 'intellectual styles' so that some may prefer to create their own problems (legislative); some may prefer to follow rules (executive); still others may prefer to evaluate rules and procedures (judicial). However, the preference he suggests may, at least in part be structured by educational activities that reward one style (the executive) over others, noting that the style acceptable may change dependent for example upon the level of education. Thus low level mathematics may tend toward the executive whereas at higher levels the legislative may be more acceptable. Like Gardner's theory of intelligence, Sternberg raises awareness of the complex and contextual aspects of the construct of intelligence.

### *Assessing ability*

It is claimed that one million pupils a year currently sit cognitive ability tests from one publisher alone; one third of all secondary schools use another form of the test (Kirkman, 2002). It seems there is a vogue to test not only subject knowledge at class, school and national level, but also to administer cognitive ability tests, by another name IQ tests, which is a highly contestable practice (Gardner et al, 1996; Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1990; Jensen, 1998; Snyderman and Rothman, 1987). Whether traditional testing by subject and by IQ tests aids learning is arguable. They certainly provide figures for measuring, a passion of the current government so evident in their education policy, yet it may be that:



“No single continuum is capable of encompassing the whole spectrum of individuals’ abilities in their different stages of development.” (Hart, 1998: p. 158)

It is even conceivable that the learning transmitted through the traditional tests has more to do with the creation of learner identity (Ball et al, 1999; Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984; Sternberg, 1990; Phillips and Zimmerman, 1990) and the ‘production of ability’ (Furlong, 1991), which is fine for those who succeed but which may result in learners who ‘fail’ or ‘do less well’ developing an ever increasing negative view of their ability to succeed (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984; Broadfoot, 1996; Weeden et al, 2002) and that:

“Children will be pigeon-holed as non-academic without any real effort being made to discover their true strengths or potential interests.” (Hart, 1998: p. 158)

The outcomes of standardised assessments, administered as “scientific instruments” though this claim is contested (Berlak, 2000), may be “deeper and more enduring” (Filer and Pollard, 2000a) than the immediate grades given. It is suggested that official assessments may, in addition to providing data that may be used in the construction of the learner’s own identity, also adversely affect their motivation (Filer and Pollard, 2000a; Moon, 1999). As they ‘learn’ that they ‘lack the ability’ to succeed in gaining what counts as truth, public knowledge, cultural capital and learning (Berlak, 2000) so they recognise the apparent futility of effort and withdraw, a scenario described by Dweck (1986) as “learned helplessness”. Even those who succeed, may tend toward an approach of ‘surface learning’, performing for gratification from others rather than to achieve a learning goal (Dweck, 1986; 2000).

While standardised, summative testing may have uses in education, for learners to develop a belief that they are able to make a difference to their learning potential, it is suggested, requires formative assessment (Black and Wiliams, 1998), where the individual strengths and weaknesses of learners are identified and strategies devised to overcome difficulties.

However, Filer and Pollard (2000a) highlight that formative assessment, like summative assessment (Filer, 2000), is socially constructed and contextual. How learners interpret interaction with assessors (Pryor and Torrance, 2000); how assessors interpret learners responses, in the light of their existing perceptions of the pupils (Filer and Pollard, 2000b); and how interpretations made by those of the learner's broader community of the assessments (Filer and Pollard, 2000a; 2000b), may all have their part to play in the construction of the assessment of ability.

### **Aspirations**

It is suggested in government educational policy documentation that too few young people aspire to continue learning beyond compulsory education. The figures given in this section refer to estimates of the numbers of young people in all forms of full and part-time education, government training schemes, employer funded training and other training schemes. Over the last decade participation in further education (16 - 18 years olds) has shown only small gains, the percentage of the age range in education or training growing from 72.4% in 1991 to 75.5% in 2001. While the percentage of 18 year olds in education or training has grown from 52.9% in 1991 to 60.4% in 2001, the proportion of 16 year olds participating in education and training has reduced from 88% in 1991 to 86.5% in 2001. Around a quarter of the population in this age group are not participating in any formal learning (DfES, 2001b). In post-18 education, although the rate of participation has risen from 14% in 1970 to 52% in 1996 in the UK some of our competitors have had much greater increases in their rates of participation. Of particular note is the huge increase in the number of students enrolled in post-18 education in Korea over the same time period, from just 7% in 1970 to 60% in 1996. Other countries increasing the participation of over 18-year olds in education at a more rapid rate than that in the UK include Finland, Norway and Australia (UNESCO, 1999).

Policy makers note that patterns of 'underachievement' are found when taking into account gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity. Thus it is claimed that boys are more likely to underachieve than girls as are those from 'working class' backgrounds rather than

those whose parents are occupied in non-manual jobs; and some ethnic groups are less likely to 'achieve' than others (DfES, 2001a). But they do not believe background should be used as an excuse (Barber 1998, 2000; Blunkett, 1999) for underperformance, lack of aspiration and social mobility.

Sociology, whether viewed as the provider of "explanations of social practices, events and phenomena in terms of social structures" (Nash, 1998) or as descriptions that aid understanding (Bertaux, 1981), is the study of groups. It is both the study of relations between groups, and the study of relations within groups. Which groups, like the categories of psychology, depends on the story to be told. Sociologists over the last thirty years or so, have tended to focus on social differentiation whether of social class, ethnicity, gender or special educational needs with little connection being made to how socialisation might impinge on the learning process (Pollard with Filer, 1996). Nevertheless, it is worth exploring some of the different sociological theories that have informed this study.

For Nash (1999d), it is to Willis' work "Learning to Labour" (1977) that he turns to find "the most influential theory of working-class educational failure". Willis' study looked at disaffected white working class males in England in the mid 1970s. According to Willis these were the students, labelled 'the lads', most likely to end up in manual labour, a number possibly achieving an apprenticeship. All other 'working class' pupils were regarded as 'conformist' in that they showed respect, obedience, worked hard, and generally took on the 'dominant paradigm' or set of values that the middle class teachers held. For Willis the explanation for 'the lads'' behaviour lay in their absorption of working class culture. This is a culture described as one where hard, physical work is tougher, better and more sensible than other forms of labour; where those who waste time on schooling know nothing of the 'real' world; where enjoyment is gained out of work, no doubt in pubs, clubs, on the allotments and with their women. This is a culture assumed by Willis to be that of resistance to capitalist exploitation, that recognises oppression and that could, if more organised, challenge capitalism and create another 'better' system. Paradoxically, he also argues that although 'the lads' challenge the system they also accept it. They accept as 'natural' common-sense that someone has to do the rough jobs; 'clever'

people will be the bosses and while they may not regard this as fair, they believe it is the way it has to be and cannot be changed. The outcome of 'the lads'' resistance to school is that they end up accepting the menial jobs but along with this they also accept 'having a laff' and various 'criminal' activities in the name of 'toughness' and 'masculinity'.

Willis' description of the working class culture resonates with my own perceptions of a sub-group of the working class yet his quasi-revolutionary explanations are less convincing especially given his conclusion that 'the lads' *do* accept the status quo; the way the world is, as it has to be. Yet in the 1960s and 1970s sociologists saw 'working-class' responses to school as a collectivist cultural 'resistance' (Biggart and Furlong, 1996). Views such as those held by Willis, saw the working class perpetuated because of a lack of resistance by those who conformed yet 'ordinary kids' did not necessarily 'conform' or agree with the school culture (Brown, 1987). Brown separated the working class into three groups each with their own 'frames of reference'. There were those who wanted to 'get in' to the working class. These were Willis' 'the lads' with their anti-school culture. A second group was those who wanted to 'get on' within the working class, wanting a 'decent' job in working class terms, such as an apprenticeship. They tended to comply with school culture to gain enough education or qualifications to 'get on'. They made an effort but only sufficient to get by. The third group sought to 'get out' of the working class into middle-class occupations. Those in this group tended to be either 'normative' where they learned for learning's sake, or 'normative instrumental', that is learning in order to gain the qualifications required to 'get out'. They made more of an effort than was deemed reasonable by the other two groups, the 'rems' and the 'ordinary kids' and could be labelled 'swots'. Brown argued that the 'rems' were not revolutionary as their aim was to maintain their position in the working class. Nor did Brown believe that the 'ordinary kids' were 'conformist'. They too may have been alienated from the school culture but chose to comply to achieve an inferred higher position within the working class. Brown's thinking resonated much more with my own both through my memories of being a 'working class' student and being a 'middle class' teacher. Yet the notion that those students who elected to follow a 'normative' route may not themselves have viewed this as a means of 'getting out' of a 'class'. The 'conformist' pupil may not be conforming

to either middle class or school values and norms but may be using a calculated strategy of 'conformity' in order to gain instrumentally, that is to gain, for instance, 'good' grades to gain 'good' jobs (Hammersley and Turner, 1980). They may also have had a desire to gain intrinsic reward, enjoying the process of learning (Csikentmihalyi, 1990) or wanted to develop or maintain their self-esteem or self-worth through positive evaluations by significant others (Covington, 1998). The causes of their behaviours may be many and various. Nor is it self-evident as Biggart and Furlong (1996) suggest that there was a working-class collective culture of resistance in the 1960's and 1970's that had, by the 1990s been transformed into individualised resistance, or that the forms of 'resistance' have become less overt than those described by Willis.

Neither Willis nor Brown provide help for the researcher interested in understanding why some within the 'working class' appear to be positioned 'rems', others 'ordinary kids' while still others are 'swots'. If 'the lads' actions are *a* cultural response of the working class (Nash, 1999d) then so too are those of the 'ordinary kids' and the 'swots'. What the work of Willis and Brown does not aid us with is an understanding of why it is particular individuals attain particular 'frames of reference' or select particular parts of working class culture as a resource. Nor do their works provide us with insight into the stability of the frames. How might these frames change over time and context? And of course, they do not look at others in society. There is an inferred assumption that middle class children will be normative, conforming to school values, but while in general this may be so, not all middle class children adopt particular attitudes to learning. The findings of Keys and Fernandes (1993) goes further. In their quantitative study of Y7 and Y9 pupil attitudes to school they suggest that there appears to be no statistical association between school catchment measures - such as type of area, type of school, % of students on free school meals, % of ethnic origin pupils, reading age of intake or GCSE results - and pupil attitude. Broad statistical statements such as these may transmit a 'fact' but they do nothing for 'understanding'. Neither the use of labels as a means of explanation (Nash, 1999d) nor the use of 'statistical significance' helps us to get closer to being able to comprehend what factors may result in the individuals becoming the ways they are.

‘Ways’ is chosen with purpose: it is important to remember that attitudes, stances, values, actions may not be static. Students may not be conformist or deviant all the time but may conform or deviate across contexts (Hammersley and Turner, 1980); their membership of a particularly labelled group does not mean that they necessarily will meet all the criteria by which the group has been judged and formed. Lauder, Freeman-Moir, and Scott (1986) and Brown, (1987) suggest that group membership may provide a resource, giving as an example of such a resource, working class culture. Thus Biggart and Furlong (1996) report from their study of students in further education that “high fliers”, while predominantly middle class are not solely middle class, and while tending to work hard and sacrifice leisure time, are not all ‘swots’, some thriving on minimal effort. Likewise although most ‘drifters’ were from working class families not all had their roots in this particular class history. Pollard and Filer (1999) show some of the complex actions and interactions with teachers, parents and peers of middle class primary age pupils and how these may influence particular learning careers. Identities may not be fixed entities, but may be subjected to influences of history, culture and power (Mac an Ghail, 1996) continually being shaped within and through everyday interactions with the social world (Rassool, 1999). Students of various classes of origin have more than their values - or influences - of their class of origin but also those of the practices of school and other patterns of life (Nash, 1999a) to draw on. Not only what these influences may be but also how they develop into ways of being, thinking, doing, saying, acting in and across contexts and time require more attention (Mac an Ghail, 1996; David, 1997; Rassool, 1999). A useful starting point is the work of Bourdieu and it is to an exploration of his work and that of others who have ‘thought with’ Bourdieu, that I now turn.

### **Thinking with Bourdieu**

Bourdieu introduces a range of ‘thinking tools’ (Jenkins, 1992) through his work. Included in these are the concepts of field, capital and habitus and it is these concepts that have intrigued me as I have thought about the possible ways in which people from apparently similar ‘classes’ arrive at very different places in social space. These concepts are fraught with difficulties as readers struggle to interpret the meanings placed on them by Bourdieu.

It is a struggle not obviously helped by the complexity and inaccessibility of his writing style (Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Grenfell and James, 1998; Jenkins, 1992), a style adopted as a means of preventing misreadings and thoughtless readings, yet apparently resulting in reductions to the readers' own interpretations that miss the original intent (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). What I want to present is my interpretations of his concepts, which may be 'misreadings' but have certainly not been 'thoughtless' readings of his work and the interpretative work of other authors. I hope that from this the reader may be able to better understand how I have 'thought' with Bourdieu and have joined those who find him good to think with (Jenkins, 1992; Reay, 1998; Nash, 1999a), using his work as 'a companion' to overcome difficulties in analysis, interpretation and explanation as recommended by Bourdieu (Harker, 1990).

### *Interpreting the Thinking Tools*

#### **Fields**

'Fields' are networks of social relationships that can be used to map out where an individual or an institution stands in relation to others in the social space where social space is regarded as "the overall conception of the social world" (Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes, 1990). Networks of fields will include fields within fields, each standing in relation to other fields (Mahar, 1990; Grenfell and James, 1998). Each field is:

"... a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them." (Jenkins, 1992)

Fields can be viewed in relational positions of domination, subordination or equivalence dependent upon the access each individual or institution has to the resources (or capital) that are at stake in the particular field. (Bourdieu, 1993; Jenkins, 1992). Wherever the individual is situated within the field, they will struggle to maintain or improve their place (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990). However for a field to operate there have to be stakes and people prepared to play for them (Bourdieu, 1993), that is, people must have 'interest'

in the field. Jenkins (1992) queries who decides the 'interest': the individual, consciously deciding these, or the social scientist? He criticises Bourdieu's notion of field because it is not made clear how the existence of a field is to be determined or how fields are to be identified. However, Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes (1990) point out that:

"The definition of a social space cannot be imposed in an a priori way, but the idea of a social space can make sense of empirical observation, its precise shape and configuration of forces being derived from the evidence at hand." (p. 10)

Where the individual resides, where they are situated, where they exist, can be viewed as a 'localization', that is a physical place, or as a relational position, a rank or order (Bourdieu, 1999).

When considering the mapping of fields it is important to consider from where the description of the space is being derived, from whose point of view.

## **Capital**

Bourdieu assumes that what is at stake in each field is the relevant capital(s), all of which can ultimately be converted into other forms of capital for the profit of the individual. His tool of capital is steeped in the discourse of the economic, but while financial capital is one form of resource, and the easiest to see the direct link with the economic, other capitals also exist. These take the form of cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) as well as symbolic capital (Jenkins, 1992).

### *Cultural capital*

Three forms of cultural capital are identified by Bourdieu (1986): embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Embodied is in effect the concept of 'habitus' that is discussed a little later. Objectified cultural capital consists of the material cultural objects such as writings and paintings, but on their own they are less valuable than used in conjunction with 'embodied' cultural capital, the means of 'knowing' the symbolic value of the



objects. Institutionalised cultural capital is academic qualifications: the crediting of particular forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge are regarded as the 'legitimate' forms and are, according to Bourdieu decided upon by the dominant classes.

#### *Social capital*

In "ordinary language" this might be thought of as 'connections' (Bourdieu, 1993). It incorporates the various kinds of valued relations with significant others (Jenkins, 1992). By being a member of a group, individuals gain social benefit (or capital) through the group. Individuals may spend considerable amounts of time and effort nurturing the most profitable connections, ensuring their 'connections' are able to be profitable for themselves. Those joining the networks must work at ensuring they are accepted into the group's culture in order to benefit from the accumulated social capital.

#### *Symbolic capital*

This includes reputation, prestige, recognition, honour and status (Jenkins, 1992). For Bourdieu to convert other forms of capital into symbolic capital is the most powerful conversion of all.

"To be seen as a person or class of status and prestige, is to be accepted as legitimate and sometimes as a legitimate authority. Such a position carries with it the power to name (activities, groups), the power to represent common sense, and above all the power to create the 'official version of the social world'"  
(Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990: p. 13)

Bourdieu's notion that everything is reducible to economism (Bourdieu, 1986) does not sit comfortably with my own interest, and that of some psychological writings, in the role of intrinsic reward (Claxton, 1988) or the notion of 'emotional capital' (Goleman, 2000). In stating this I am not inferring that the economic in a broader sense than the pure financial, should be condemned but that there may be more to 'struggle' for than the four capitals outlined above, if 'struggle' is the appropriate word.

## Habitus

Habitus is, according to Bourdieu (1993), a system of 'permanent' dispositions that are gained by implicit or explicit learning and that are

"... the product of all biographical experience" (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 46)

*Permanent* does not mean that habitus is a static or mechanistic concept. It is not habit, that is it is not repetitive, mechanical, automatic or reproductive, but is productive and generative (Bourdieu, 1993) both reproducing and transforming (Reay, 1995). It:

"... unites the past and the present for, while being the product of early experience, it is subject to the transformations brought about by subsequent experiences." (Nash, 1999b)

Thus habitus is a set of dispositions that are created and recreated through interaction with structures and personal history, acquired in social positions within a field. It includes a person's own knowledge and understandings of the world, not as a 'reflection' of the 'real' world, (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990) but as perceptions, thoughts and feelings (Nash, 1999 b; Jenkins, 1992) as well as actions (Grenfell and James, 1998). These dispositions, which may change as positions in the field change (ibid), set the boundaries of the choices that an individual (or group) can make or see as possible (Harker and May, 1993; Reay, 1995; Jenkins, 1992; Nash, 1999b). But, although this is likely to result in actions of a reproductive rather than a transformative nature (Reay, 1995) social mobility, whether upward or downward, remains possible (Bourdieu, 1999). As mobility occurs so too does the habitus transform to adapt to the new situation.

While habitus is reflective of the structures in which it has been acquired it also allows for the individual to move position and, once in position, to adopt one of a number of possible postures thus allowing some flexibility in the actions and reactions practised and the strategies used. The constraints that habitus impose are those of the socialising agents and

the structures of the material and social environment. The child is likely to see the world in the same way as the older generation (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990) as they are inculcated with the culture of their families and communities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), but as the social conditions change over time, so the habitus of each successive generation will adapt in order to reach a compromise with the material conditions (Harker et al., 1990).

Critics of the work of Bourdieu argue that habitus does not adequately account for variation in the outcomes or trajectories of people within group, whether at family or social class level (Nash, 1999b). Taking Bourdieu's emphasis on the inculcation of a 'cultural arbitrary' by family, community and formal education and the desired goal of such inculcation being the reproduction of a scheme of thought, perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), it is easy to arrive at such a conclusion. Yet Bourdieu also points out that:

“... just as no two individual histories are identical, so no two individual habitus are identical...” (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 46)

There may be patterns within groups and therefore, a group or class habitus of a generalised nature may be identifiable (Bourdieu, 1993) but it seems that to account for intra-group difference it would be helpful to view habitus as unique to the individual. In any case, if habitus is viewed as incorporating not only past history but also present meaning, a meaning or understanding made by the individual (Harker et al., 1990), then the resulting thoughts, perceptions and actions will be tinged with the past, the present and the interpretation of the individual of both these. Added to this Bourdieu also reminds us that while a particular world view may be inculcated through generations, some will seek for their children positions, capitals and cultures different from their own. In so doing they may create a tension between the desire to reproduce and transform; a tension brought about through the repositioning of themselves in relation to their mobile children (Bourdieu, 1999); a tension resonating with that of American families with hopes and

dreams for their young that turn a stigma on the lowly position of the older generation (Sennett and Cobb, 1972).

Whether through generational reformation or personal transformation, (or combinations of the two), habitus comes alive, not as a necessary passive acceptance of a culture, a way of being, but as a dynamic, forming and reforming process incorporating old and new, past and present, structure and agency, psychological and sociological aspects of the individual's world, or rather world view, allowing for replication, production and reproduction. By using a "finer-grained analysis" (Harker, 1990) of the formation of habitus than exploring only at class, but also at family level allows for the uncovering of that which stays constant, but also that which changes for it is:

"... what is not reproduced that is at once the engine of change and the arena for human agency." (Harker, 1990)

It is in this interpretation that habitus has been considered in this thesis. Such an interpretation adopts an underpinning theory of learning based on the socio-cultural theory of learning developed by Pollard with Filer (1996). Thus, although individuals do learn the "normative frameworks and assumptions for 'making sense' in their society" (Pollard with Filer, 1996: p. 7), these frameworks are filtered through interactions with others and are adapted or adopted by individuals in the light of intra-individual interpretations and perceptions.

## Summary

In this chapter I have explored aspects of the literature on concepts of learning, motivation, 'ability', and aspirations; four factors that I have argued in Chapter 1 form a basis for lifelong learning. I have shown that concepts of learning broadly range from the passive transmission of knowledge and skills sometimes referred to as 'shallow' learning through to 'deep' learning where learning is viewed as active meaning making. Theories on the concepts of learning tend to privilege the intra-individual domain and although 'deep'

learning infers that interpersonal interaction occurs and that context, experience and values help to shape the learning, thus implying the role of the socio-cultural domain, these are not developed sociologically. In this thesis I explore what frames of reference learners hold for concepts of learning across a range of contexts that go beyond formal schooling and analyse the data in the light of the scope and limitations provided by the socio-cultural positions the young people hold.

It is suggested that links exist between concepts of learning and motivation. Thus those holding a 'deep' concept of learning tend toward motivation for intrinsic reward, whereas those seeking external reward for their actions are associated with 'surface' learning. Motivation may also be linked to how an individual perceives intelligence: whether they believe it is fixed or malleable. However, as with the theories on concepts of learning, it is the intra-individual domain that is privileged in the work of psychologists. In asking what frames of reference young people may hold about motivation, note is taken that there is a need to consider the interpersonal domain (Gipps and Tunstall, 1998) as well as the socio-cultural (McDermott, 1993).

In addition to differing frames of reference regarding intelligence described above, young people may also have differing frames of reference about their perceived ability, be that high, average or low. Intelligence is a highly contested concept but it is suggested that the predominant view of intelligence is that it is 'fixed' (Pollard and Triggs, 2000). However, there are theories of intelligence that suggest it is developmental (Dweck, 1986; 2000); that there may be different types of intelligence (Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1990) and that different intelligences may be required in different contexts (Sternberg, 1990). Assessing of 'intelligence' and 'ability' is problematic and it is suggested that assessment, whether summative or formative is socially constructed (Filer and Pollard, 2000a; Filer, 2000). How individuals then interpret and respond to such assessments may influence their concepts of learning, their motivation, and their aspirations. In this thesis I explore how young people make sense of 'intelligence' and 'ability', testing and the assessments made of them by others. I include not only assessments made in formal learning situations by

teachers or examiners but also in informal and non-formal learning activities and by parents and peers.

Finally, the aspirations of young people are explored. Here I consider the different frames of reference young people hold about their positions in life, the positions they aspire to and their understandings of how such aspirations may be gained, or lost. While the theorising of sociologists and their interest in the socio-cultural domain predominates the literature, in order to interpret the differing aspirations of young people, I draw also on the interconnections between this domain, the interpersonal domain, and how aspirations are mediated by social practices, and the intra-individual domain. I explore how the interpretations and understandings individuals hold, especially about their motivations, abilities, social position of the present and hoped for social position in the future, may help to shape their aspirations.

In this chapter I have described aspects of the literature that has influenced the shaping of this thesis in terms of the four factors I have identified as the frames of reference foundational for lifelong learning, and the potentially different ways the factors may be viewed by individuals, that help shape the sense they make of themselves as learners, that is their learner identity, and of learning, or learning identity. There is another area of literature that has also influenced the making of this thesis, that relating to contrasting models of education. In Chapter 3 this literature is discussed and the FORs presupposed by the two alternative models of education considered.

## **Chapter 3: Models of Education**

### **Introduction**

“Learning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition.”  
(DfEE, 1998: p. 7)

Currently there is a global trend regarding learning whereby education is spoken of by policy makers as the panacea for all our social, political and economic ills. It is the magical solution to all our global problems. This assumption Hughes and Tight (1995) claim, has the nature of ‘myth’; that is, whether the assumption is actually true is not at issue but rather the assumption is held up as self-evident.

When Tony Blair came to office in 1997 he declared his three priorities to be “education, education and education”. Within 67 days of coming to power New Labour published their White Paper “Excellence in Schools”, followed in 1998 by the publication of “The Learning Age”, the White Paper referring to ‘lifelong’ learning from which the above quote is taken. As the Government settles further into its term of office the rhetoric surrounding learning remains constant. In January 2000 David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment reinforced the importance placed on learning:

“We have entered a new century in which learning will define our lives as never before. Whether we succeed and prosper, as individuals or as a country or fail to progress and fall behind, will depend on our knowledge and skills, abilities and understanding.” (Blunkett, 2000)

The next New Labour Secretary for Education, Estelle Morris retained the theme:

“To prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century competitive global economy, Britain must transform the knowledge and skills of its population. Every child, whatever their circumstances, requires an education that equips them for work and prepares

them to succeed in the wider economy and in society. We must harness to the full the commitment of teachers, parents, employers, the voluntary sector, and government - national and local - for our educational mission.” (DfES, 2001a: p. 5)

Like the Conservatives before them, New Labour has entered the education arena with vengeance, announcing policies, initiatives and funding for education throughout its stay in power. It is not alone in the world; other governments too are keen to emphasise the importance of learning to each individual within each nation and to create policies designed to promote learning. Ball (1999) refers to these as “policyscapes”, that is “local manifestations of global policy paradigms” rather than specific policies to a particular party, supported by global agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In terms of Labour’s policies, he argues that they have adopted the “Black Box” approach of inputs and outputs.

“Locked inside the black box, an absent presence, out of sight in this policy panopticon is LEARNING!” (Ball, 1999: p. 201)

In this chapter it is suggested that although it is not new for education to be described, analysed and acted upon through a discourse of ‘economism’ (Ball, 1999), the current over-emphasis on one aspect of this discourse, namely the use of the factory model to reflect a description of learning, is in danger of impoverishing concepts of learning and reducing the learner to that of a “cultural dope” (Lauder, Jamieson, and Wikeley, 1998). I begin by considering the ‘factory model’ of education and the ‘discourse of economism’ that I argue is predominant in educational policy and is well documented in the literature, before turning to consider an alternative model of education, perhaps best described as the ‘learning’ model and a change of discourse into ‘learnacy’ (Claxton, 2000).



### *100 Years of 'Economism'*

Callahan, (1962) describes in detail how educational practices in America were affected greatly by the introduction and adoption of 'scientific management' techniques taken from the work of industrialist and mechanical engineer Taylor who began to conduct his studies in a smelting works at the start of the twentieth century. Here measurement to ascertain 'efficiency' in all aspects of the organisation, including the workforce, was the 'order-of-the-day'. Today, early in the twenty-first century, 'effectiveness' and 'improvement' prevail as the 'buzz' words within education, perhaps more euphemisms for 'scientific measurement' at the expense of the humane; for the 'discourse of performativity' (Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson, 1998) at the expense of the holistic learner. That is not to deny that those involved in the research and promotion of school effectiveness and school improvement do themselves refer to education and learning beyond the economic, but rather that the proliferation of factory metaphors and industrial analogies appear to me as the reader, to be so dominant in their texts that other discourses are rendered feeble and subordinate.

From the flesh of the effectiveness literature, with it's acknowledgement that school effect may account for only 8 –14% of student outcome (Reynolds, 1995; Reynolds et al, 1996; Reynolds and Farrell, 1996); that other factors may also have a significant effect (Teddle and Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds et al, 1996) and that, in any case, outcomes are of themselves problematic in their definition (Reynolds, 1995), comes the bones of educational policy and its associated school inspection machinery (Reynolds, 1995). Especially influential in the construction of the bones, has been the work of Reynolds, and it is because of this influence that I focus on his work here. But bones without flesh, many would argue, are an emaciated attempt at reconstructing the body. As Callahan (1962) asks us to consider what happened to Schmidt, the pig-iron handler of Taylor's experiments – that is all of Schmidt, his health, his happiness, his stamina, his motivation, his family and his little home – so in this chapter I ask the reader to consider what happens to the learner in the factory model of learning – *all* the learner.

## **Education as Factory: Learning as Osmosis**

According to Bollen (1996) a simple conceptualisation of school is that of an input-throughput-output system where

“... there is no need to look at the ‘throughput’ phase which would bring about an enormous increase in the number of relevant factors.” (p. 12)

He goes on to explain that the throughput phase is difficult to analyse both because of its complexity and because key factors such as the motivation and willingness to improve are both hard to observe and almost impossible to measure. However, the model is, he says, useful to assess results. The problem with this somewhat vacuous conceptualisation of the school is that it addresses none of those areas that have always appeared impervious and yet imperative to understanding learning and the learner, for me the very lifeblood of schools. Not only does he manage to erase from the discourse in one deft move of the pen, the centrality of learning but he also discards the broader societal, cultural, economic and political environments that may all play their part in the act of learning. Even when he continues that through the work of the school improvers, attention has been drawn to the outside-school environment, it would appear that he is referring to local and national education departments rather than the whole society that impinges upon the learner.

Bollen is not alone in either ignoring altogether these broader factors, or proclaiming allegiance to holistic reasoning while marginalising all but school factors. School effectiveness and school improvement research tends to inadequately acknowledge the social and political context of schooling (Thrupp, 1999). Thrupp argues that schools are only able to do so much to change, that socio-economic factors will override much of that aimed for by educational policy-makers as well as much of the effort put in by teachers. As Slee and Weiner (1998) remind us, the rhetoric of holism is often lost in the writing on school effectiveness and the simple factory model returns. An example of this can be seen in Reynolds (1995). In describing the negative side of school effectiveness he points out that the movement has:

“... been instrumental in creating a quite a widespread, popular view that schools do not just make *a* difference, but that they make *all* the difference . . . the performance measures of schools used within national policy themselves explain all school variation as due to schools, since no other influences are measured.” (p. 59)

He goes on to list a number of uncertainties within school effectiveness research regarding the size of the influence of schooling as compared to family and community influence on outcome; to classroom effects being more salient than school effects; to a possible lack of consistency in school effects over time; to the possible inconsistency of school effects over a broad range of outcomes, greater than the purely academic; and to the variance in effectiveness across sub-groups of students. This is set against a backdrop of his notions of the positive effects of school effectiveness research that he claims:

“... has convincingly helped to destroy the belief that schools can do nothing to change the society around them, and has also helped to destroy the myth that the influence of family background is so strong on children’s development that they are unable to be affected by school. . . destroying assumptions of the impotence of education, and maybe also helping to reduce the prevalence of family background being given as an excuse for educational failure by teachers. . .” (p. 58)

Rationally this reads as a balanced argument for school *and* family effect yet the use of the term ‘excuse’ somehow, perhaps irrationally attempts, to invalidate the notion of family background or at least to subjugate the factor, making it easier to conclude that school effects are all important whereas family background is a poor explanation for variability of educational achievement. This ‘irrational’ reaction to the text becomes stronger as Reynolds launches into areas he identifies as requiring additional research as a response to these variables. He clings tenaciously to school and broader local and national education systems while appearing to eradicate the pupil, the family, peers, community and the broader society. By the time he arrives at ‘ineffective schools’ he is in full flow:

“They are likely to be missing the prior competencies that are needed to do precisely the kinds of things that we tell them they have to do to become more effective, like development planning, for example . . . They may be, in fact, thoroughly non rational institutions, where all sorts of delusions may flourish as a means of ineffective and ineffectual individuals avoiding the brutal truth of their own ineffectiveness. Catchment areas, local authority housing estates, local social and economic conditions, and parents may be projected upon and used as excuses for failure.” (p. 67)

For the solutions, Reynolds turns to the ‘factory’, firstly in the particulars of ‘High Reliability Organisations’ and secondly in justifying blending educational ‘solutions’ from abroad, or rather from the Pacific Rim.

Taking the notion of High Reliability Organisations first, Reynolds proclaims:

“When bridges collapse, when airliners crash, when rail accidents happen and when human errors occur that impact tragically upon others’ lives and life chances, we attach the highest priority to identifying what went wrong. Neither in education nor in educational research do we behave in this way . . . (p. 67)

He suggests that it would be useful to study those institutions not permitted to fail in order to find ways to produce high reliability education. The industrial jobs named are those of airline traffic controllers, nuclear power plant operatives and electricity supply operatives where 100% reliability is ‘essential’ (Reynolds et al., 1995; Stoll et al, 1996)

From these organisations are extracted ‘characteristics’ – though how the characteristics are selected remains a mystery to the reader – of High Reliability Organisations. In the mid 1990s these were listed as training of the workforce, limited goals, Standard Operating Procedures, attention to minor errors in case these are able to escalate to major failings, simulations to identify weak links with action being taken to identify ‘trailing edges’ and make it more effective and the organisations being well-resourced with equipment being kept in good order. (Reynolds, 1995; Reynolds et al, 1996). They have since been

updated, removing the simulations of weak links and good resourcing and adding data-richness involving indicator systems, performance assessment and serialisation to understand and improve the functioning of the organisation; benchmarking against best practice; proactive recruiting, a combination of hierarchical, vertical organisation with the capacity to go lateral in 'peak'/crisis times; and ensuring organisational detail and fine print to avoid 'cascading errors' (Teddle and Reynolds, 2000: 320). These may indeed be characteristics of all of the High Reliability Organisations but let's consider at least some of the features omitted from the text which may themselves seriously contort the analogy of 'factory' organisations and schools.

Taking air traffic control to begin with, a key omission must surely be that air traffic controllers have an aim to land aeroplanes safely. So do the airline pilots with whom they communicate. Indeed airline pilots are themselves workers within High Reliability Organisations and as such have the same 'characteristics' as the air traffic controllers. Pilots and controllers have been selected and some will have 'failed', either at selection or subsequently during training or rechecking. This is quite different from the situation in schools where the teacher is working with conscripts willing or otherwise, except to an extent in selective schools. In nuclear power plants and electricity supply plants it is with the inanimate that the workers are dealing. As any teacher or parent will tell you, children are not inanimate. In terms of inputs-throughputs-outputs the 'materials' are quite different between the sub-groups of the organisations listed. Some are animate, selected and fully trained; some are inanimate and selected – low quality inputs are unacceptable as the Japanese and Germans have pointed out to the British nuclear industry; and some, the students, are not selected, are animated and are only in the process of 'being trained', if that is what education is about. How these differences in 'material' may affect the effects of the selected characteristics of High Reliability Organisations on outputs needs further investigation, even if we are to accept the characteristics themselves as unproblematic.

So what of Reynolds other solution, to look to 'high reliability forms of schooling', such as he claims is found in Taiwan (Reynolds, 1995: p. 69). Well, here again it is first pointed out to the reader that there are dangers in attempting to transfer practices from one

area to another; from one culture to another (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996). This said, they go on to justify experimentation with transfer and once again, dip back to the factory to do so:

“When such experiments have taken place within non-educational sectors of society – as with the British motor industry’s use of a blend of British and Japanese practice – they have been productive for the professionals concerned and for the wider society.” (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996: p. 59)

At this juncture two points seem worthy of comment, firstly that parts of the British motor industry, once a much heralded model of ‘successful’ dual-culturalism, appears currently to be in intensive care following radical surgery, (albeit after having had additional foreign bodies transplanted); and secondly, as a bit part actor in the industry through the mid 1990s I am minded of Goffman (1959) and the notion of the act front of house and backstage. When the claims made for one of the British automotive manufacturers in the early 1990s (Jones and Hendry, 1992) are considered and its subsequent inability to deliver on a number of ‘key factors’ including profitability one is left asking whether Reynolds and Farrells claim that non-educational sector experimentation of transplantation is productive, might not itself be problematic, at least in some instances. The question then becomes, which instances and why?

Reynolds and Farrell conclude, through international comparisons, that English schools have greater variation in achievement than those in, for instance, Taiwan because in Taiwan there is time, the opportunity to learn and goal clarity, all missing in English schools, pedagogy is simpler in Taiwan and there is whole-class instruction.

Time, the opportunity to learn and goal certainty and clarity reflect the model constructed by Creemers (1994 cited in Reynolds et al, 1996) although whole-class directional studies is absent from this model. In Creemers’ model, however lurk other factors such as student motivation, aptitude and social background, reminding us that there may be more to achievement than the Taiwanese example might suggest. Brown (1998) meanwhile alerts the reader to the possible political dynamics of the work of Reynolds and Farrell (1996),

drawing attention to aspects of the Taiwanese results not dwelt upon in “Worlds Apart?” namely that:

“... the bottom 10 per cent of pupils in Taiwan were no better than those in England.” (p. 34)

If this is so, one may want to enquire whether the Taiwanese system has quite the level of homogeneous quality in its educational output proclaimed by Reynolds and Farrell.

The theme of homogeneous quality in outputs, however is one that prevails not only in the work of school effectiveness researchers but in the writings of Barber, Head of the Government’s Standards and Effectiveness Unit, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and player in the production of the Government’s White Paper “Excellence in Schools” as well as in the texts of OFSTED. In Barber’s terms outputs are ‘standards’ which he claims should be constant (Barber, 2000). He claims that:

“... the Blair government ... built on the Conservative government’s reforms, sharpened the challenge and, crucially, added the support.” (Barber, 2000: p.6)

The challenge is to “set high standards and expect every student to meet them” while recognising that some students may require additional assistance. According to Barber this can only be done by varying the inputs – presumably into the child - so that pedagogy, time and place may change in order to achieve constant output (Barber, 2000). This, Barber states, is at variance to old beliefs that inputs were always constant resulting in variable outputs that were, in the past explained away by social factors and the ability of the child. Here then, is the discourse of the factory so prevalent in Labour’s approach to learning as described by Ball (1999): inputs such as the National Literacy Hour, outputs in such guise as national numeracy targets and GCSE performance scores. Learning appears to reside within the ‘Black Box’ and, as Levin (1994) points out:

“... policies ... are presumed, almost unthinkingly, to yield changes in what students do, think, or learn.” (p. 760)

This notion of learning, where outcomes are seen in terms of productivity, relies on the notion that educational outcomes and performance can be scientifically measured, “normed” and improved so that the human being becomes a more efficient labourer (Luke, 2000). This human capital model of learning conceptualises the human subject as:

“... a generic, infinitely perfectible industrial-era machine, with an infinitely adjustable and expandable repertoire of quantifiable skills and competencies.”  
(Luke, 2000: p. 1981)

while school is seen as:

“... an adaptable machinery of curriculum, instruction and assessment geared to mediate and moderate quantifiable differences in behaviours, skills and competencies.” (Luke, 2000: p. 1981)

Reflecting these concepts is the Labour government’s rhetoric, claiming as it does that all people have talents and potential but they have, historically, been overlooked (Blunkett, 2000; DfEE, 1997). State education is about literacy and numeracy skills; access to culture, history and the place of the country in the world; an opportunity to gain insight into the best that has been thought and said and done; it will ensure that young people learn to respect each other and themselves; to understand the moral code on which civilised society is based; to appreciate the cultural background of others; and to develop character and attitudes such as responsibility, determination, care and generosity. At the same time there will be “zero tolerance of underperformance.” (DfEE, 1997: p. 5)

Aiding the government in promoting the notion that the mechanical child can be perfected by the correct school machinery has been the government’s own inspection machinery, the Office for Standards in Education, especially, its Chief Inspector, Woodhead. In his 1997/98 Annual Report he describes continuing weaknesses in a number of schools,



placing responsibility for the condition firmly at the teacher's feet and the school's door. But if Thrupp (1999) is right in his view that schools can only achieve so much, it may be time as he suggests, to consider the possibility that schools may not be able to make a difference in important ways.

In some people's eyes:

"... schools are re-created as pre-Freudian landscapes in which there is an absence of individual intention, structure of feeling, emotional responses, repression, displacement and irrationality." (Mac an Ghaill, 1996: p. 173)

Not everyone has this apparent belief of the cultural restorationists, that the child is passive within the learning process (Ball, 1994), nor that the school is "of a piece" (Ball, 1997). As Stoll and Fink (1996) recognise:

"... pupils are not standardised and teaching is not routine." (p. 6)

Levin (1994) asks us to imagine a factory where raw materials have minds of their own, so that a piece of sheet steel may get off the production line stating that it does not wish to be part of a car. Students make choices as to how they will respond to stimuli, (Levin, 1994; Stoll and Fink, 1996) although these responses may themselves be shaped and framed by the different 'tapestries of culture' that are the individual histories within groups often believed to be mono-dimensional (Rassool, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1996) as well as by the multiple structures within which the learner finds herself (Furlong, 1991).

The factory model, although meeting the requirements of simplicity and order to help make sense of complexity and chaos through the use of a familiar, inanimate object as analogy (Horton, 1967: 223), too easily becomes a means to reduce the learner to a 'malleable material' (IPPR, 1993) and the school to a machine, while ignoring the broader issues of culture, history, society and politics altogether. But, it may go beyond this, by privileging and legitimating one form of discourse, that of the economic, while repressing and marginalising others (Smyth and Dow, 1998).

So what needs to be considered if the factory model, within the dominant discourse of economism, is to be usurped?

### **Taking a Break from the Factory**

Taking a break from the factory model does not mean a rejection of the notion of inputs, processes and outputs as a useful way of thinking about learning on some occasions, but it means we are able to wend our way from the claustrophobic atmosphere of the factory with its targets, credentials and accountability, through the factory gate to a space where the air is cleared of the worst excesses of economism. Here we are able to take time to consider education in terms of learners and learning. We can consider the learner as more than potential 'factory fodder', but as a human being; we can consider learning as more than the mechanical re-creation of human capital, but as the creation of human agents. We can explore who and where the learner is, how they may have arrived and where, why and how they may be going in the future. We are able to consider not only how learners may learn through inculcation and rote but also how they may make connections in their own minds; how they may draw on past experiences as they try to make sense of the world for themselves; and how the interpersonal, intra-personal, social and emotional may affect and be affected by their learning (Hartley, 1998; Pollard with Filer, 1996).

In the discussion which follows I compare the assumptions about learners and learning that are made within the 'factory' model, with possible alternatives drawn together from the literature. I begin by considering the learner who, it is argued, is regarded as 'malleable material' in the factory model (IPPR, 1993). I then turn to explore the process of schooling that Luke (2000) claims is regarded in the factory model as the machinery of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. I consider different perspectives on what needs to be learned, how best to promote such learning and how best to assess it in order to develop 'lifelong learners'. Through this discussion I begin to develop two contrastive models of education: the factory model with its heavy emphasis on standard outcomes and passive learners and an alternative that places its emphasis on the process of learning and the

development of the learner as an active participant in the creation of meaning. I then move beyond the 'factory' model and the discourse of 'economism' to redefine these models in a discourse of 'learnacy' (Claxton, 1999). Using the work of Broadfoot and Pollard (2000) and the findings of the PACE project (Pollard and Triggs, 2000), I show how the 'factory' model may, in terms of 'learnacy', be redefined as a 'performance' model of education and the 'learning' model may better be described as that of 'competence'.

### *The Learner*

I have argued that in the factory model of learning, learners are regarded as passive, inactive beings into which knowledge is transmitted. Those who advocate a transmission mode of learning give the impression of believing that the learner passively and unproblematically internalises the knowledge transmitted without any form of reaction to the transmission (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). If one then questions the learner they will be able to retell the transmitted 'knowledge' and the learning cycle will be complete. If the learner does not reproduce the 'knowledge' they should have acquired then the transmitter must in some way be faulty and therefore needs to be fixed. This view of the learner and the learning process is consistent with the philosophical position of the principles of learning held by behaviourist psychologists (Hartley, 1998). It is a notion of the learner that is highly problematic especially when considering the array of research that has been conducted which suggests learners to be both overt and covert resisters (Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987; Biggart and Furlong, 1996; Cullingford, 1991; Rudduck et al, 1996) or at least that they make choices about how they respond to stimuli offered (Levin, 1994; Stoll and Fink, 1996). It is clearly at variance with the socio-cultural theory of learning developed by Pollard with Filer (1996) which theorises that learning involves an active individual making sense of the world through social interaction and socio-cultural position. The factory model is a view of the learning process that sees the 'process' as external to the learner.

In Chapter 2 it has been shown that research raises the issue of individual psychological difference that may affect the process of learning. Cognitive psychologists try to establish

how individuals go about gathering information from their environment, how they mentally organise it and make personal sense of it and how they then apply this knowledge (Jonassen and Grabowski, 1993).

Individuals may also have different 'abilities' to learn. As we have seen in Chapter 2 debate abounds about the concept of 'intelligence' or 'ability'. Whether through nature or nurture they may develop very different talents. How they perceive 'intelligence' and their 'abilities' may be important in determining how much effort they are prepared to expend on attempting to learn as the work of Dweck (1986; 2000) suggests. So too might their conceptions of what it means 'to learn': put simply passive acquisition of knowledge and skills or active interpretation and understanding.

While behaviourists assume that at least young children may be able to be motivated by a issuing of extrinsic rewards and punishments, it is shown in Chapter 2 that alternative theories exist on learning motivation that suggest the importance of the role of goals. These may be goals set by others or by the individual learner but what Dweck (1986; 2000) suggests is of particular importance is whether the goal is for extrinsic or intrinsic reward. The former might include for instance, to gain qualifications, favourable judgements or 'targets'; that is "performance" goals (Dweck, 1986). The latter is about a desire to become more competent or to understand more and to gain satisfaction from the learning; that is "learning" goals (Dweck, 1986). How individuals perceive the concept of motivation may affect their actual behaviours and the learner and learning identities that they assume.

So too may their emotions. The terrain of 'emotions' and 'personality' is yet more very swampy ground that is difficult and problematic to wade through. Whether emotions and personality are stable traits affecting actions or whether actions affect the traits is yet another conundrum for debate (McCrae and Costa, 1984; Goffman, 1959; Lazarus and Lazarus, 1994). What seems less contentious is that individuals appear to react differently to circumstances. McCrae and Costa (1984) suggest that people will have different levels of neuroticism, that is anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, vulnerability, impulsiveness

and hostility; extraversion, that is warmth, assertiveness, gregariousness, need to seek excitement, positive emotions, activity; openness to experience, to ideas, feelings, fantasy, need for variety of actions, values and intellectual curiosity; agreeableness as in compassion or antagonism; and conscientiousness including organisation, persistence, achievement and goal directed behaviour (Geisler-Brenten et al, 1996). Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) point out that although there are great individual differences in our biological and psychological make-up, individual life histories will also shape emotional patterns. They see emotions as being a necessary part in the decisions people make as to the action they will take. Emotions alert the individual to take action when there is an appraisal that what is happening in the individual's world is harmful, threatening or beneficial, and while reason may be used to decide the best course of action, the action will be designed to control the emotion.

The final area of individual difference that I want to draw attention to is that of gender and gender identity. According to the government, one of the current problems in secondary education is the gender gap in achievement (DfES, 2001a) although the achievement gap needs to be contextualised as in science and maths there is little evidence of a consistent difference in achievement, whereas English tests show a very different pattern (DfES 2001a; 2001c; 2001d; 2002). Nevertheless, there is a 'common-sense' notion, supported by government ministers, that boys under-perform and that it is their 'laddish' behaviour that is impeding male learning (Francis, 1999; Duffy, 2002). However, there is a danger that by talking about boys' 'under-performance' it is assumed that *all* boys are so afflicted. According to David Spendlove (TES, 2002) GCSE results show that boys in the south-east perform better than girls in the north-east hinting that factors other than gender may be at least as much part of the story as 'laddish' culture.

Whatever the reality of the results, 'gender' is an issue that may affect the learning process. But to discuss 'gender' is to once more risk being plunged into an area of complex, competing theories. Once more the notion of nature or nurture rises from the sodden ground (Bem, 1993; Burn, 1996). Bem (1993) believes that societal pressures and culture shapes the way individuals see gender, limiting motivation and abilities to

biological sex-type and therefore limiting the potential of individuals. This socialisation process results in the formation of a gender identity (Severiens and Dams, 1997) or gender schemata (Bem, 1993) which looks at the prevailing ideas of what women and men should be and how they should behave within a particular culture rather than biological gender. But not all people conform to polarised gender identities and it is suggested that by overemphasising the stereo-typical, important differences within gender are frequently overlooked (Burn, 1996).

A number of potential individual differences have been highlighted that may directly affect the learning processes of the individual but also, may be used as lenses through which individuals make sense of 'learning'. These differences are those to be found in the intra-individual domain of learning. What follows is a comparison of the 'factory model' in terms of the schools machinery of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Luke, 2000), with alternative suggestions of structuring the external learning processes pupils' could be exposed to.

### *External Learning Processes*

Tooley (1999), writing of the perception of influence Barber has over Labour policy speaks of 'two Barber's': Liberator and Central Controller, these categories seemingly mirroring the schizophrenic character that appears to be the current state of educational policy in England in terms of the learning process. It is at once proclaiming to be of a variable nature to ensure that all learners achieve the required standard outcomes (Barber, 2000) while appearing to practice rigidity through standardised curricula in the form of the National Curriculum and specific topics such as citizenship, democracy, culture, history and parenting; standardised pedagogy such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Hour, interactive whole class teaching and the systematic teaching of thinking skills and creativity; and standardised evaluation of pupils, teachers, administrators, organisations and systems through national testing, assessment and inspection (DfEE, 1997; DfES, 2001a). Variation is provided through the advocacy of setting pupils by ability, the use of Education Action Zones, Excellence In Cities programmes, specialist schools and the

introduction of work-related learning post-14 for young people who have become disaffected by schooling. Additional 'learning' time can be gained through out-of-school clubs and summer schools while time can be gained by the more able through fast tracking and accelerated learning. Gifted and talented pupils will also be encouraged to "achieve mastery, rather than superficial coverage" (DfES, 2001a: p. 21) and some will have the opportunity to attend summer schools at an Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth.

Thus we see the supposed 'liberating' of education from the state in the apparent choices being offered through such measures as Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities programmes and specialist schools and the increased 'choice' presented to learners, post-14, between academic and vocational pathways. This is based on the neo-liberal theorists view that free unregulated markets will maximise efficiency and guarantee individual freedom (Wells et al, 1998). It is assumed individuals (or their parents), seeking their own or their children's betterment (IPPR, 1993), will make choices that best meet their needs and aspirations (Tooley, 1999), 'rational' choices that are made on the basis of cost-benefit analysis (Lauder and Hughes, 1999). Here the individual is regarded as a potentially active agent, responsible for their own existence (Rose, 1996). Responsibility for the working of educational policy is shifted from the policy-maker to the consumer (Ball, 1994; Jonathan, 1997).

On the other hand it has been argued earlier that policy-makers view the pupil as a passive learner. O'Hagan (1999) suggests that a number of myths underlie recent educational policy including that children acquire 'important' knowledge mainly through being deliberately taught by teachers in schools and colleges. This is contrary to the notion of Lave and Wenger (1991) who make a fundamental distinction between intentional instruction and learning, the learning happening in all contexts, the instruction not necessarily being of itself "a source or cause of learning" (p. 89). Further myths suggested by O'Hagan (1999) are that as children now know less than they used to and less than other countries, this flaw needs to be remedied by defining important knowledge and increasing the quantity and quality of teaching of important knowledge in schools. Quantity can be increased by amount of time children spend with the teacher, on

homework, as well as out-of school clubs and summer schools. Quality can be increased by specifying national standards and the success of the measures can be determined accurately through national testing of children. Such an ideological approach Swann (1998) claims is favoured by people who support hierarchical, non-collaborative organisations and where:

“... prescriptions are dispensed from the upper to the lower strata, to people who are neither encouraged nor expected to be critical and whose independence is restricted.” (p. 221)

This is the discourse of the “technocratic-reductionists” who believe in the culture of efficiency and hierarchical management, and believe that all areas of the curriculum should be designed to ensure particular learning outcomes (Codd, 1994).

The change of government to New Labour in 1997 seems to have left curriculum, pedagogy and assessment largely undebated, perhaps presumed to be based on common-sense as to spurn discussion. Labour’s model of schooling is a:

“... decontextualised, ‘basic skills’ approach that stands in stark contrast to the ‘high’ skills’, knowledge-based, post-Fordist economy portrayed in Labour’s own policy texts and policy rhetorics.” (Ball, 1999: p. 203)

There is a view privileging traditional values and beliefs and although the slogans of ‘back-to-basics’, whole-class teaching and standard assessments appear to have popular appeal, it is worth considering other voices.

## **Curriculum**

Ball (1999) believes that the Labour government assumes it is addressing employers concerns about student’s basic skills deficiencies but he asks:



“In terms of economic competitiveness is what is measured here what is needed?” (p. 204)

Some claim that the needs of the modern industrial society will best be met by adopting a scientific concept to learning activities, that is promoting logical, systematic, decontextualised learning activities (Grigorenko, 1998); others believe that working life requires more than this, including perseverance, motivation (Gardner et al, 1996; Rebok, 1987); engagement and commitment (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983); imagination, flexibility and determination (IPPR, 1993). Problem-solving, thinking skills, an ability to apply knowledge and skills, communication skills, creativity, personal management, teamwork, empathy, the ability to live alongside others, and the ability to access, interpret and organise relevant information may be at least of equal value in the post-modern world (Brown and Lauder, 2001; Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Gardner et al, 1996; Sternberg, 1990; Harris, 1995).

Harris (1995) suggests that there may be a need to reduce the demand for more content in the curriculum, a sentiment shared by Gardner (1993) who contemplates the need to sacrifice breadth for depth in the middle years of schooling so as to encourage creativity, critical thinking and understanding thus helping students to apply their skills and knowledge. Whether all children need to study all subjects is also open to debate (Gardner, 1993; Gardner et al, 1996; UNESCO, 1998). Pathways that more closely match the needs and values of the individual may provide better learning although UNESCO (1998) warns that careful consideration needs to be taken of individual dispositions to ensure that people are not automatically channelled into particular employment pathways by the choice of academic or vocational curricula.

### **Pedagogy**

In terms of pedagogy, government rhetoric is rich with notions of ‘best’ practice as if that which works for one will work for all, but this taken-for-granted view is blind to the possibility that teachers, implied by some school effectiveness and school improvement

literature as providing low quality education, may actually be adopting differing strategies with students from low socio-economic backgrounds in an attempt to enhance their students' learning (Thrupp, 1999). One-size-fits-all approaches to learning also seems deaf to prior achievement. Phelan et al (1992) found differing pedagogical preferences among children of high and low achievement. Similarly, Delpit (1988) argues that people from different cultures will have different views on how best to learn or teach. Teachers require the skills to be able to accept the students with their diverse cultural backgrounds while helping them progress, through the use of strategies appropriate in the particular cultural context. It may be teachers, rather than policy-makers, are best placed to identify and use to advantage these preferences and differences. However, in the work of Reay and Mirza (1997) as in that of Delpit we are reminded of the difference also between white teachers with their white histories and black teachers with quite different cultural roots. 'Best' practice may provide useful avenues for thought amongst teachers trying to identify strategies to aid their students. Teaching by central dicta may impoverish rather than enhance the learning experience of some.

## **Assessment**

Formal education continues to privilege the gaining of factual knowledge, which has to be remembered and reproduced to meet the needs of assessment (Ramsden, 1988; IPPR, 1993). Apparently subordinate to this is understanding and the subsequent ability to apply knowledge appropriately. Gardner (1993) claims that students – and maybe adults – often give the appearance of understanding because they can regurgitate factual information or rules within the school setting, but beyond the school, they are unable to apply the knowledge in new environments. Testing and assessment that privileges short note essays, agreed marking schemes and multiple choice are likely to encourage memorising rather than understanding, surface, rather than deep learning (Hartley, 1998) and even questions supposedly designed to promote deep learning can result in students trying to answer the question rather than in understanding (Vermunt, 1998). Where testing and assessment are seen as ends in themselves such as they are when learning is viewed in terms of currency for employment, this superficial educational outcome is unlikely to be regarded as

problematic. But for those regarding learning as a way to attain personal growth and self-fulfilment as well as or even instead of for economic reasons alone, then testing and assessment become hot topics for debate. Even if we consider only the economic we may still feel concerned by such an approach if our beliefs are that to succeed in the global economy we need to move towards a 'high skills' economy: that is we need to move away from rote learning and static skills to creativity, problem-solving; to experiential learning rather than transmission (Wells et al., 1998). Students, to become effective life-long learners, will need to be aware of their own 'road blocks' in learning and know what to do about them. They will require guidance in overcoming their weaknesses but to maintain confidence and to remain motivated they will also require experience of success, however small the improvements might be (Broadfoot, 1998).

When the traditional tests are used for accountability and currency, the resultant learning may have more to do with risk minimisation, product maximisation and relief (or despair) than imagination, understanding and a desire to learn more. Frightened students may turn to rely on "... the safety of habit or the mimicry of learning. . ." (Fielding, 1999a) while frightened teachers turn to the "... curriculum of the dead" (Ball, 1993 cited in Fielding, 1999a).

This is not to argue that assessment has to be damaging to the learner and should not occur; Swann (1998) and Sternberg (1990) alert us to the notion that for learning to take place may require the acknowledgement of error, incompetence or limitation. Nevertheless, assessments that label, attribute blame, penalise and measure a narrow range of competences, work always in favour of the academically high achievers and take little account of the educational, sociological, psychological, economic and political dimensions of testing may need to be called into question rather being taken-for-granted.

Assessment for learning may need to take into account individual difference, context, students' own reflections and self-assessments, feedback from others – including peers as well as teachers – the opportunity to experience new and varied problems, and a safe environment, free from blame, where feedback is constructive and minimises anxiety

(Gardner et al, 1996; Krechevsky and Seidel, 1998; Eizenberg, 1988; Swann, 1998; Weeden et al, 2002); where students are given a sense of ownership and control over their learning activities and the emphasis shifts from competition to collaboration (Broadfoot, 1998). Dependant upon the hoped for outcomes from learning, it may need to move beyond the assessment of basic skills and traditional notions of knowledge and skills through paper and pencil tests to include formative assessment of a range of intelligences in a range of contexts through a range of media. It may need to take into account the rational and the emotional elements of the learner, their social and cultural histories, their hopes and their aspirations as well as the hopes and aspirations of the privileged politicians and corporate bodies. It may need to become assessment for growth and development rather than assessment for the measurement of human capital. But this depends on what the hoped for outcomes are.

### **Outcomes of (Formal) Learning**

For the government, outcomes revolve around qualifications, measures and targets especially relating to the 'basic skills' which, although there is some text within government rhetoric that suggests an awareness that learning and education may be about more than the measurable, nevertheless, pervades the writing. This narrow focus may prevent, or at least restrict, other outcomes being realised. Targets emphasising vocational credentials may be encouraging extrinsic motivation and self-interest rather than learning for transformation, social change and critical intelligence (Ecclestone, 1999). Through this overemphasis of extrinsic motivation, may come a reduction in long-term motivation and a desire to learn as well as the conditions to promote creativity (Sternberg, 1990), precisely the opposite of what is required for life-long learning. It may also foster rote learning to gain a qualification as a means to gaining future employment, a view promulgated, it is claimed, by teachers (Rudduck et al, 1996) and returns us once more to the traditionalist stance regarding the transmission of learning. Teachers and learners may see learning as 'getting through' with the minimum engagement (Ecclestone, 1999), tailoring efforts for the perceived rewards of the assessment system (Broadfoot, 1998). This may undermine the belief in the potential for intrinsic motivation and encouraging a

belief that many learners are incapable of intrinsic motivation (Ecclestone, 1999). Regulatory requirements may lead to high volume take up but with a ceiling rather than a floor where the aim is to achieve the minimum (Schuller and Burn, 1999). If Ilon (1994, cited in Smyth and Dow, 1998) is correct in his assumption that the masses will require a minimum education in literacy and numeracy as well as discipline and tolerance, then mass education through rote learning may be sufficient to provide this. However, if the goal is to increase the numbers of people entering the labour market with abilities in creativity, problem-solving and reflexivity (Strain, 1998) then we need to look more closely at what may be learned by young people as they are fed a diet of set curricular and summative assessments. If the aim is to select and channel pupils to different occupational and social positions (Broadfoot, 1996) then summative assessments may well work in ensuring pupils learn to know their 'rightful' place. But if the aim is to aid learners to learn and to empower them (Weeden et al, 2002) then there may need to be a move toward the increased use of formative assessment designed to support the learning process and to develop competent and confident learners. If what is required is people who will take part in 'intentional' learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) only when sufficient external motivational rigging (Claxton, 1988) causes them to do so, then again the 'back-to-basics' approach with a heavy reliance on measurable outcomes need not be problematic. But if the aim is to foster:

“... an enquiring mind and the love of learning . . .” (DfEE, 1998: p. 7)

then a greater understanding of the development of 'intrinsic reward' (Claxton, 1988) in individuals would be helpful in determining how such dispositions may be fostered. If the aim is to enhance liberalism, that is that the individual is free to do as they wish without state interference (Carr and Hartnett, 1996); to increase competitiveness and emphasise short-term self-interested decision-making then current education policy may provide a suitable basis (Ball, 1994). But education may also be designed to encourage:

“... intrinsic motivation to improve one's skills, solve a pressing communal problem or promote a particular collective ethos” (Ecclestone, 1999: p. 334)

That is education may be about the resolution of social needs rather than the freedom of the individual (IPPR, 1993); it may be about the fostering of “collective efficacy” to solve such problems as the impairment of the quality of life and the degradation of the environment (Bandura, 1995) or to nurture the “positive freedom” of democracy through equality of opportunity (Carr and Hartnett, 1996). This may require creativity, imagination and critical thinking along with self-reflection and collaboration (Codd, 1994). It may also require the consideration that all learners do not begin at the same point.

### *Social factors affecting learning*

The school effectiveness movement may note, but then largely sideline socio-economic factors; politicians, policy makers and the now-departed Chief Inspector of Schools may claim that there is a need for fewer people to use socio-economic factors as an “excuse” for academic “failure” (Byers/Blunkett cited in Barber 1998; 2000; OFSTED, 1999b) but draped upon the individual are social, economic, political and cultural cloths, defining and bounding, darned with the personal histories of each body, and influencing the:

“... subjectivities, expectations and aspirations of the individual and the group.”  
(Rassool, 1999: p. 27)

To discard the fabric is to denude the model of learning, leaving it vulnerable in its nakedness.

One of the problems of the generalised classifications used – working class, black, female, poor, powerful and so on – is the inference that it is the particular classification alone that determines an outcome. Thus, as Mac an Ghaill (1996) points out, there is a weakness in research that falls into the trap of over generalisation, obviating intra-group differences

and leaving itself wide open to the assertion that it is flawed, because it is easy to find the exception to the rule. So as Nieto (1994) points out:

“Many children who live in otherwise onerous situations also have loving families willing to sacrifice what it takes to give their children the chance they never had during their own childhoods. Thus, poverty, single-parent households, and even homelessness, while they may be tremendous hardships, do not in and of themselves doom children to academic failure.” (p.393)

Education may help some working class people to gain social mobility in the labour market, but it may also help to reproduce existing social definitions (Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1999; Reay, 1995) and, in any case, there may be more to education than preparation for the labour market. Brown (1987) alerts the reader to the possibility of within class difference while Mac an Ghaill (1996) and Rassool (1999) raise the notion that identities may not be fixed, but in a constant state of flux, acting and reacting to the influences of everyday life in which the individual is positioned. The role of peers and parents in the formation of identity may prove to be fertile ground to explore (Steinberg, 1996; Nash, 1999; Caldas and Bankston, 1997; Thrupp, 1999). Class derived culture may influence outcome (Biggart and Furlong, 1996; Brown, 1987; Reay, 1995; Furlong, 1991) as may poverty (Brown and Lauder, 2000; 2001) and labour market conditions (Biggart and Furlong, 1996) and in multi-cultural society, ethnicity also needs to be entered into the model (Rassool, 1999; Delpit, 1993). In the factory model all of these potential influences are conspicuously absent. So too is the power of politics. The complex web of relationships each providing opportunities and threats to individuals and groups and the subsequent reactions to domination and subjugation are nullified in the inanimate world of machines.

### **Beyond the ‘factory model’ and the ‘discourse of economism’**

This chapter has briefly explored an element of the privileged discourse of economism, a privileged discourse within education policy, namely the use of the factory model to describe learning. While not wishing to discard the economic dimension from education

and learning, through the overemphasis of productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, managerialism and the return to Taylor's world of 'scientific management' that the factory model promotes, other modes of discourse and thinking may well be nullified and rendered impotent. In so doing, elements of the learner, along with chunks of the environment in which the learner resides, as well as the learning process, are lost to those seeking to understand how to help learners both help themselves and help the society in which they live.

To move away from the 'discourse of economism' and the 'factory model' we need to introduce a discourse of 'learnacy' and consider alternative models of learning or education. An alternative model has been developed by Broadfoot and Pollard (2000; Pollard and Triggs, 2000), based on the work of Bernstein. They contrast a "performance" model of education with a "competence" model. The 'performance' model is consistent with the factory model described above, whilst the 'competence' model provides an alternative way of viewing learning at school and teacher level as well as at the classroom and pupil level. These models resonate with Dweck's (1986; 2000) work on 'performance' and 'learning' goals, but through the use of the term 'competence' rather than 'learning' it allows for 'performance' education to be regarded as learning of a kind that is unlikely to be suited to lifelong learning. In contrast it is argued that a 'competence' model may be preferable for creating a positive approach to lifelong learning.

Of particular interest is the addition to the classroom and pupil level of the assumptions about pupil learning that are made in the 'performance' and 'competence' models, provided by Broadfoot and Pollard (2000). The performance model of education, they suggest, is oriented to performance and extrinsic motivation with a tendency to produce 'surface learning', instrumentalism, learned helplessness and withdrawal. By contrast, the competence model highlights mastery and intrinsic motivation; it provides the potential for 'deep' learning but, they add, there is a tendency for such an approach to learning to produce "routinization and evasion" (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000; p. 21).



Broadfoot and Pollard (2000) argue that a 'performance' model of education emphasises that there is a specific output that the learner must acquire through the creation of a particular text and the gaining of relevant skills. Learners become aware of what outcome is valued through the use of explicit assessment procedures, procedures that result in the hierarchical positioning of learners in terms of their performance. In contrast the 'competence' model of education stresses the creativity of the learner, who is regarded as actively involved in the learning process of constructing meaning. This model, it is argued, could be seen in much primary school practice from the late 1960's to the late 1980's and with it came the encouragement of pupils' autonomy, creativity, activity and reflexivity (Nias, 2000). With the introduction of the Education Reform Act, 1988 came a move toward a 'performance' model of learning with an emphasis on measuring standards in English, maths and science through national testing. Findings from the Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (PACE) project are used to support Pollard and Triggs (2000) argument that the 'performance' model of education that now dominates education policy, is resulting in a shift from process to product in classroom practice. Pupils' have become increasingly aware of what they need to learn and the pressure to perform, gaining knowledge and skills through the passive process of sitting, listening and writing, rather than through activity. There has been growing pupil dissatisfaction with the curriculum and even success does not result in 'liking'. Pupils worked hard but this was to gain 'good results' with a minimum of effort rather than to understand more. Where pupils did talk of wanting to understand this was seen to be in terms of satisfying test requirements rather than as evidence of active engagement in the learning process. When test results were gained these were regarded as "pronouncements of attainment" rather than as a way of aiding learning. These pronouncements were well understood by pupils, who 'knew' who were likely to 'succeed' and who would 'fail'. Low achievers felt helpless. These conclusions have been used to support the argument that the 'performance' model produces surface learning, instrumentalism and learned helplessness.

The 'performance' and 'competence' models provide a useful means of summarising alternative 'frames of reference', as discussed and developed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, that may prevail in the minds of young people. It provides also a means of summarising

the apparent underpinning FORs that help to shape educational policy, which I have argued in this chapter most closely resembles the FORs associated with a 'performance' model of education. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the contrastive models and the associated FORs. However, it should be emphasised that these are ideal typical models both in terms of government rhetoric, which has also stressed the importance of a love of learning, and in the way the model is applied in schools. For the purposes of this thesis the crucial question is how do these ideal typical models, and in particular, how do the FORs presupposed by the performance or factory model, map onto students' understanding of their FORs and the factors in and outside school that may change them?

These two contrasting models of education and the FORs they presuppose provide part of the theoretical framework that structures the thesis. However, on their own they do not provide a means of understanding the contexts in which FORs develop, nor do they provide scope for the possibility that FORs are not permanent 'dispositions'. FORs, if a socio-cultural theory of learning is adopted, such as that developed by Pollard with Filer (1996), are open to re-interpretation as new opportunities and threats are faced by learners, and as new social interactions and experiences are entered into. The intra-individual meanings and interpretations of individual learners need to be seen in the light of the contexts in which they are formed and the positions from which the world is viewed. The work of Bourdieu, interpreted through the lens of the socio-cultural theory of learning (Pollard with Filer, 1996), introduces a means of analysing the social position from which learners view their world but also the resources such a position provides for learners, and the ways in which such resources determine the scope and constraints within which they make sense of the world.

By the use of these three interconnected theoretical tools: 'performance' and 'competence' models of education; intra-individual, interpersonal and socio-cultural domains of learning; and fields, capitals and habitus I investigate to what extent education policy (underpinned by assumptions of a 'performance' model of education) as translated into practice (through the intra-personal, interpersonal and socio-cultural domains of learning), helps or hinders the creation of the conditions needed for a 'competence' approach to lifelong learning.

**Table 3.1: Contrastive ‘frames of reference’ of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ models of education**

	<b>‘COMPETENCE’ MODEL</b>	<b>‘PERFORMANCE’ MODEL</b>
Pupil interpretations and perceptions - ‘FORs’		
Concepts of Learning	Learning for understanding; ‘deep’	Acquisition of facts and skills; ‘surface’
Motivation	Intrinsic reward; to understand, become more competent	Extrinsic reward; eg favourable judgement ‘payment’
Ability: ‘Intelligence’	Incremental, developmental; ability to improve, self-efficacy	Fixed, entity; limits to possible improvement
Ability: Assessment	Formative - used to progress learning	Summative - for measuring and categorising
Aspirations	To continually improve; aspire to some new learning; to set and achieve own goals (and maybe those of others)	To do enough to achieve ‘goals’ whether own or others

## Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

### Introduction

In this chapter I describe the design of the research and consider some of the key methodological issues. The research, conducted as a longitudinal survey by interview, was initially influenced by phenomenography (Saljo, 1988; Marton, 1997). Later an interpretation, especially in relation to the work of Haig (1987; 1996), of a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was adopted. A concrete description of the processes involved in the research is provided, cleansed of much of the messiness and presented more clinically than reality seems to me. None-the-less, some of the difficulties, complications and decisions are discussed to provide the reader with a partial view of the:

“... practical and intellectual struggle to sustain the project, construct an interpretation and decide upon a strategy for dissemination.” (Pollard with Filer, 1996; p.290)

In accord with grounded theory methodology the research ultimately evolved as it progressed but a summary of the overall research process is given in Table 4.1 to provide the reader with a sense of the direction eventually taken as well as to contextualise the research in time.

It is recommended in grounded theory that preconceived categories are bracketed out of the research process for as long as possible so as not to contaminate categories that may emerge from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987)<sup>1</sup>. However, as has been stated in Chapter 1, using ‘orienting theories’ drawn from the literature<sup>2</sup>, interest, experiential data (Strauss, 1987) and later from the empirical data, four potentially crucial FORs for learning have been identified. Data collection has focused on these

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion of this position is given later in the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

**Table 4.1: Overview and timetable of research process**

Year	98	1999			2000			2001			2002			2003		
Term	A	Sp	Su	A	Sp	Su	A	Sp	Su	A	Sp	Su	A	Sp	Su	A
Educational stage of pupils/Key events				Y8			Y9	O	KST							
*Initial literature review																
Pilot survey: design, collection, analysis, write up																
Introductory exercise: data collection																
Interview 1: data collection																
Analysis of exercise and interview data																
Educational policy documentation analysis																
Interview 2: data collection																
Analysis: previous analysis and new data																
Interview 3: data collection																
Supplementary data collection: records; teacher interviews																
Analysis and write up: all data																

- \* Literature was continuously reviewed throughout the research process  
O Option choices  
KST Key stage 3 tests

dimensions, or FORs, which are: concepts of learning, motivation, ability and assessment, and aspirations. It is the frames of reference individual students hold in regard to each of these dimensions that is the focus of the study. Contextual data has also been collected from the students to provide an overview of the socio-economic contexts with which the students are familiar as well as the identities by which students 'know' themselves or want to be known. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the intentional coverage of the dimensions

in the design of the research. During the course of the introductory written exercise and the interviews some additional data were gathered beyond that intended, covering other dimensional areas. Field notes, student records and teacher interviews were used to supplement the students' narratives.

**Table 4.2: 'Frames of reference' and the research design**

	Identity	Concepts of learning	Motivation	Ability and assessment	Aspirations	Social context
Written exercise	✓					
Interview 1		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interview 2	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Interview 3		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Field notes						✓
Student records	✓		✓	✓		✓
Teacher interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓		

This then provides a summary of the research but I turn now, in Section 1, to a more detailed description of the data collection and analysis of the research process. In Section 2 some of the methodological issues that have arisen in this study are explored.

## **Section 1: Describing the Research**

### *Data collection*

It was the initial intent to conduct individual interviews with twelve children in Year 8 in each of three schools: a state school comprising mainly working class children, a state school with a more even mix of working class and middle class children and a private school, where I assumed there would be a high proportion of middle class children. The choice of school type and socio-economic groups arose from my interest in the work of Brown (1987) that I have described in more detail in Chapter 2. This explored the frames of reference working class boys held in relation to the class position they sought to hold and how this was reflected in their attitudes and behaviours towards schooling. I wanted to expand this notion to explore possible variations in frames of reference amongst middle

class children. I also wanted to consider whether pupils' with different levels of prior attainment held different frames of reference. I thought that the numbers of students involved sounded pragmatically feasible for a sole researcher to contend with while allowing an exploration of views across a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds and 'ability'. Additionally I wanted to consider the role of gender in perceptions of learning and motivations to learn. I therefore sought to have equal numbers of male and female students in the sample of students from each school. The actual research transpired not to develop quite like this.

### **Selecting Who to Research**

#### *The Schools*

I wanted to gain access to pupils in three schools and had in mind two state schools I would like to use. My preference was on several grounds: firstly I already knew the head teachers and some of the senior managers of the schools and had some 'knowledge' of their espoused values and beliefs about education. These values and beliefs appeared, on the surface, at least, to have much in common. I had also worked from time to time on various educational projects with both schools, putting me in contact with a number of members of staff and pupils and providing me with my own subjective judgements of the schools and their inmates. In fact both schools played an important part in my reflections about teaching and learning prior to becoming involved in this research. It was to a great extent because I made informal comparisons between these two schools, along with others I had also worked with, that made me begin to question both what I knew and what was known by others about teaching and learning; the subject fascinated me and so too did these particular schools. Pragmatically my 'knowledge' of the head teachers led me to believe I might find it relatively easy to persuade them they would like their schools to take part in the research and on this point I was not disappointed.

My contact with the private sector was much more limited and although I had worked with a number of private schools in the past these tended to be at the level of classroom teacher and pupil and mainly single sex schools. My supervisor however, had contact with a

senior manager of a private school that was co-educational and through the use of this contact, access was gained. The schools are described in much more detail in Chapter 6 where consideration is given to their positions in the field of education. In summary, the three schools, all located in a relatively affluent part of Southern England are:

- Willow Way: an urban comprehensive school with a relatively high number of students categorised as from a lower socio-economic class. The school has had a history of difficulties in its results, staffing and OFSTED assessments;
- Oak Park: a rural technology college with a mix of students ranging across the lower and middle socio-economic classes. The school has received favourable judgements from OFSTED and gains above average results in national examinations;
- Beech Hill: a private school with a city location. Although there are scholarships available at the school, the school has a skew toward relatively affluent middle class backgrounds. In terms of examination results it does extremely well relative to the two state schools.

Preliminary meetings were held in each of the schools. At Willow Way the first meeting took place with only the head teacher. At Oak Park I met with the head teacher and two members of his senior management team, a deputy head teacher and the head of lower school who was designated as my contact point for arranging the research with the students. The preliminary meeting at Beech Hill was formally with the deputy head teacher but included lunch and tea allowing me to see and be seen by a range of staff in a less formal arrangement. At Willow Way a subsequent meeting was held with the relevant Head of Year who became my contact point at the school. At Oak Park the contact point changed between the second and third interviews due to staff changes, the new contact being the Head of Year.

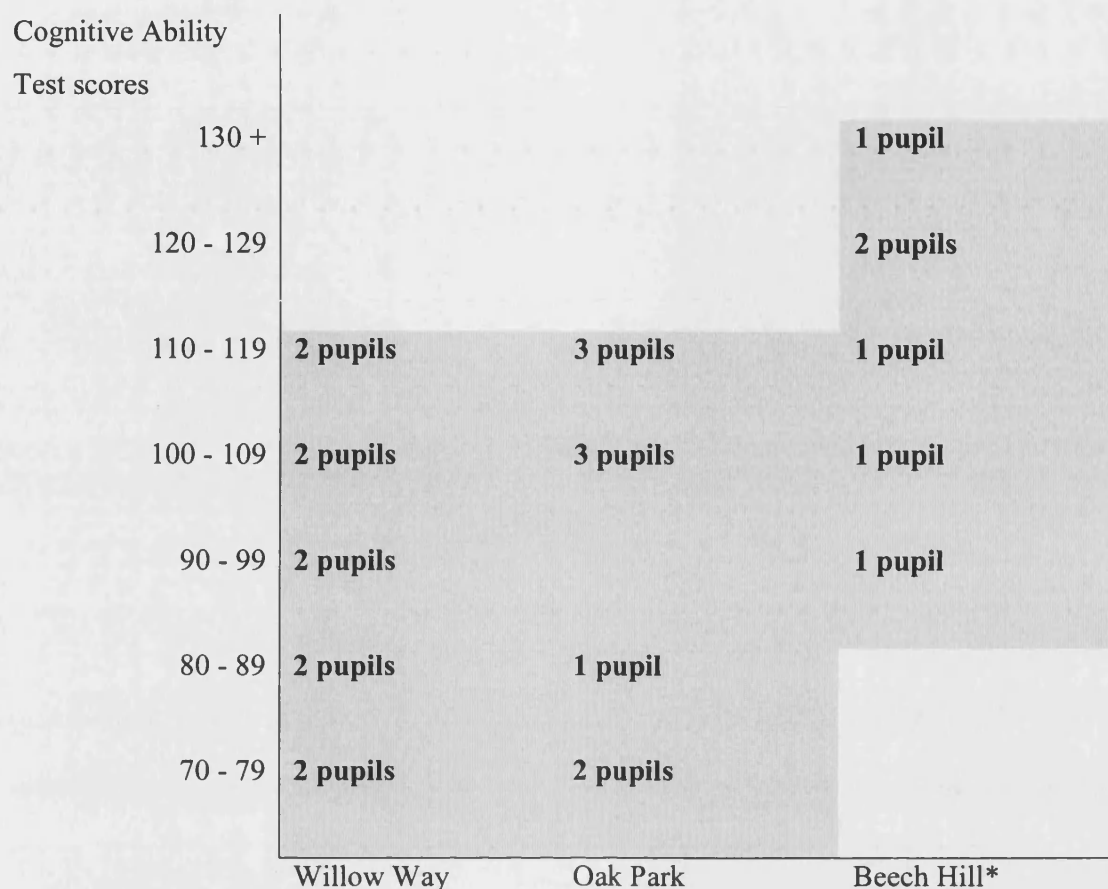
### *The Pupils*

At each of the preliminary meetings with staff discussion ensued about the purpose and nature of the research as well as practicalities regarding the selection of students and the logistics of interviewing. I had initially considered using quota sampling (Wellington,



1996) of students on the grounds of socio-economic status in each school. I decided ultimately to take a cross-section of abilities as a key criterion of the selection of the sample for my study of the literature had aroused an interest in the possibility that perceived and actual abilities might be a frame of reference for the perceptions students had of learning. It was agreed with each school that four students from each of the categories of 'low' average' and 'high' ability should be selected. These categories were to be relative to the school. Pragmatically this was more achievable than attempting to categorise the students by their socio-economic backgrounds, such data not being readily available in at least one of the schools. The use of cognitive ability test scores as a means of identifying the young person's ability was suggested by the head teacher at Willow Way. Subsequently, I suggested the same means of identifying students by ability at each of the other two schools and this was agreed in all cases.

The actual selection of students varied in that at Oak Park and Beech Hill I was given access to year lists and made the selection of students, splitting the scores into three broad bands of low, average and high and selecting the students from the mid-points of the bands except in the case of Beech Hill's lower ability students where I selected lower scoring students to provide a greater overlap with the scores achieved by students at Willow Way (see Figure 4.1 below). At Willow Way the contact teacher made the selection but as she was very new to the school she claimed her knowledge of the students would not affect her decisions. This did however mean that she was able to omit students she did not wish to be interviewed. The other two schools, on the other hand, had a similar opportunity later when they invited the selected students to participate in the research. Not all thirty-six students elected to be involved and there is no way of knowing at what point their withdrawal took place, by whom or for what reason. At the start of the research 25 students agreed to be involved in the research; their 'cognitive ability' distribution is given in Figure 4.1 below. It should be noted that the two state schools used the same tests while a different test was used at the private school. The results are therefore not directly comparable. However, when Key Stage 2 results are also considered as they have been in Chapter 6, the positioning of measured 'ability' is skewed as Figure 4.1 shows.



**Figure 4.1: Distribution of students by 'ability' participating in the research.**

\* Test taken varied from that at Willow Way and Oak Park. Results are therefore not directly comparable.

In terms of gender there were five girls and five boys from Willow Way; six girls and three boys from Oak Park; and one boy and five girls from Beech Hill. The schools attempted to find additional pupils from each of the 'ability' categories and gender groups to make up the original request, but as these were not forthcoming I worked with the twenty-five students who agreed to participate.

### **Ethical considerations**

Throughout the research I have attempted to follow the guidelines given by BERA (1992). Each school contacted the selected students and their parents in writing. I provided a standard letter which the schools adapted to suit their own style. A copy of the letter is

given in Appendix A. The letters provided information on the nature and purpose of the research, confidentiality and sought permission to interview the students as well as gaining access to their school records. In addition to the letters, at the beginning of each session with the pupils I reminded them that I would endeavour to ensure anonymity and maintain confidentiality. I also stressed that they did not have to answer questions if they did not wish to do so. As I wanted to tape record the interviews the students were also asked for their permission to do so at the beginning of each session explaining that although aspects of the transcribed data may be used in writing, I would be the only person that would have access to the tape recordings. The pupils were informed before writing about themselves in the first session, that their work might be reproduced in a 'book'. At the end of each session pupils were given the opportunity to ask me questions. Most students did not wish to request additional information about the research but when there was such a request I tried to answer clearly, honestly and using appropriate language.

### *Gathering data*

The intention as I began the task of gathering data from the young people was that I would interview the students on three separate occasions, adding to the questioning should any additional aspects arise from the analysis of the previous round of interviews. Part of my reasoning for this was that I could then use this as a form of data triangulation (Denzin, 1997) exploring the same questions over time and analysing continuity and change. Such justification now cannot be made, for the research and the researcher began to take on a life of their own and went in a different direction. The reasons for this arose as the research moved away from the strictures of phenomenology toward the apparent greater 'freedom' of grounded theory. This point will be developed in Section 2 where I will also consider the strengths and weaknesses of this change of direction.

### **Giving Student 'Voice': Student's Own Accounts of Themselves and Themselves as Learners**

As I read around the subjects of learning and researching I became increasingly interested in the notion of 'voice', of the notion of researcher and researched, of the power of

interpretation in the construction of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> I was conscious that my pilot study, while attempting to provide open-ended questions that allowed some scope for the interviewee to influence the direction of the data, also closed down the choices of response by the very nature of the question. I wanted to try to find a way of balancing my continued 'need' for structure in the data collection and providing opportunity for a greater freedom of 'voice' for the respondents. To this end I began the data collection process not with individual interviews with the students but with group sessions (one per school). I asked the pupils to communicate to me what they would like me to know about them and themselves as learners. Having discussed my approach with the head teacher of the urban school and having had the suggestion made that I invite students to communicate in a way of their choice which did not necessarily have to be written, I also provided options of communicating through art or role play. However, all the students elected to write their accounts. Some of these accounts are reproduced verbatim in Chapter 5 and further details of the meetings are made as way of introduction to the chapter. The other accounts are given in Appendix F. This part of the research took place in February/March 2000.

#### **First Interview: Spring Term, Year 8 (March 2000)**

Within two weeks of the introductory sessions with the students, I met the young people again, but this time to interview them individually. Although I used the students' written accounts as a basis from which to conduct the interviews, checking understanding of aspects of the stories and asking for further details or reflection about statements, I rapidly returned to my comfort zone of semi-structured questioning, setting out my framework of interests. I attempted to use 'open' questions but also retained control of the direction of the interview, although at times it took minor deviations from my semi-structured script. For the nineteen students that had written their own accounts for me, a personalised version of the general framework of questions was created. An example of a personalised questioning schedule is given in Appendix B along with the generic template of questions.

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<sup>3</sup> See Section 2 for further discussion of 'voice'

The general structure of the questions followed a pattern. I began by asking the students to tell me about how they use their time when not in school. The reason for opening with this was two-fold: I wanted to begin the interviews in a way that would pose little threat to the students and may help to build their confidence in talking to me. The first question needed to be something that they would almost certainly be able to answer in some way. I felt sure all students would be able to talk about their hobbies, interests or activities that they were involved in out of school. The second reason for asking this question first was that I wanted to explore young people's notions of what 'learning' means to them in ways that were not restricted to formal learning, that is schooling. It had been suggested to me that by conducting the interviews in school I might inadvertently privilege educational learning and close down the possibility of other forms of learning as legitimate. In some way I wanted to reduce this effect and chose to attempt to do so by positioning the question at the front of the interview. At times through the interview I reminded students that they might like to consider their world beyond school when they responded to questions, thus attempting, when I felt it to be appropriate, to remind them that I was interested in more than just formal learning. From the opening question I then asked them about those activities they enjoyed or did not enjoy being influenced as I was at this point in the research by the notion of intrinsic reward being gained from activities. Students were also asked if they thought that they learned anything from the activities and further questioning followed to try to uncover how they arrived at the response given. I also asked about their perceptions of their abilities in the out of school activities.

The second set of questions was similar to the first but this time covered how time was spent in school. I began by asking the students to tell me what they did in school and progressed through questions on enjoyment, learning and ability. The third section of questions focussed on the young person's views about ability, I asked the young people to reflect on their own views of ability, trying to elicit whether children theorised about ability as a fixed or variable entity. Next I asked students to tell me about what was important to them in their lives and tried to elicit where 'learning' was placed in this. It is worth noting that it was only much later that I considered that the learning' spoken of here was likely to be more accurately described as 'schooling' or 'education', in other words,

formal learning rather than a broader definition of learning. The next series of questions brought the broader context of learning back into focus when I asked students to tell me about times when they were keen to take part in an activity and times when they did not wish to, followed by questions on what switched them on to want to learn and what switched them off. Students were then asked what they thought the purpose of 'learning' is. There is a reservation here again that 'learning' may have been interpreted by some as 'schooling' and by others more broadly. This criticism stands also for the next question that asked whether the student thought they would do any learning after they left school. While in my own mind I assumed the question was sufficiently open to allow for a variety of interpretations of the term 'learning', the question may well have lead students to think only of formal education. The last set of questions on the first interview schedule related to the family to help me set the child in their social context out of school.

By the end of the first round of interviews I had gathered an overview of each pupil's story of learning and the context in which this story had developed. The interviews were designed to take 30- 40 minutes but in some cases lasted up to an hour and were curtailed. Students differed in the level of ease they seemed to have with the interview process. Some liked to talk, others were quite reticent, all told a story. Balancing time with non-verbal cues as to the willingness of the young person to continue being questioned and my own interest in finding out more, meant that interviews varied according to the individual circumstance. There seemed little point trying to get a student to reflect more deeply about an aspect of interest (to me) if body language told me they had switched off. The tension between wanting to find out more and possibly alienating the interviewee lead me to err on the side of caution and attempt to ensure the student was willing to return for subsequent rounds of interviews. In any case, another balance was needed, between my call on the student's time and their absence from lessons, an issue that required tactful negotiation with the schools involved. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full.

## **Second Interview: Autumn Term Year 9 (October/November 2000)**

I retained my affinity for the use of semi-structured interviews in the next round of interviews although I did not follow my initial intention of using the same structural framework. In the intervening months between collecting data in Year 8 and re-interviewing the students in Year 9 I had been working with educational policy documents and some of the underpinning 'body of knowledge' surrounding them. Chapter 4 explores this aspect of my research in more depth and looks at the notion of education policy through the discourse of economism. Reading the policy documents another interconnected discourse also appeared to show through: that of judgement and especially of the use of national tests to judge and categorise students, teachers and schools in the name of 'raising standards'. From this my path moved to academic texts on judgement and stigmatisation as well as on formative and summative assessments and their part in the learning process, as shown in Chapter 2. Given that the students were now in their final year of Key Stage 3 and were to take national tests later in the academic year, it seemed to be a good opportunity to explore what the students had to say about evaluative judgements that had been made about their learning, both in general terms and specifically through testing. I wanted to find out what students have to say about judgements made of them and the frames of reference they hold that help them make sense of the judgements. From this I sought to explore how students' perceptions of judgements may affect their own construction of their learner identity and the identity they give to 'learning'.

Section one of the second round of interviews thus looked at evaluation and judgements. I began with a request for students to tell me about comments or judgements others have made about work the students have done or activities they have taken part in. From this further questioning explored how such comments have been received and the reactions of the students to them. As part of the question students were reminded that responses could refer to comments made in or out of school thus opening up the opportunity for reflection on the broader concept of learning rather than schooling. The remaining two questions in the section focussed on schooling. The first of the questions was intended to explore whether students perceived testing as a formative or summative process as well as looking

at how students reacted to test results. The second of the questions explored the student's views about the purpose of tests, both at school and national levels. The exact wording of the questions is given in Appendix C, although again wording sometimes varied dependent upon the circumstances of the time and to aid understanding by the interviewee.

The second part of the interview focussed on options, another key area of educational policy and highly relevant to the students as they would shortly begin the 'option' process by which they chose or were chosen to take particular course in the next Key Stage of their education. As students had not yet been informed of this process, this seemed an ideal time to ask students about what they would choose to learn if there were no constraints placed upon them. Further questioning explored the reasons for their choices. Questions were also asked about learning styles another possible factor in the variations of student reactions to learning situations.

These interviews were shorter than those of round one and tended to last 20-30 minutes. This was partly to minimise disruption of the student day but also was to reduce any risk of alienation through too prolonged questioning. As with the first round interviews the whole interview was recorded. On this occasion full transcripts were not made of the entire sample, but rather short notes were made of the taped interviews and these were used to track aspects of the interviews which were then listened to and transcribed as required. While this approach appeared to save considerable time by avoiding large scale transcribing, having to relocate aspects of the interviews for quotation and use at the analysis, interpretation and write-up stage probably negated much of the time advantage.

### **Third Interview: Summer Term, Year 9 (May 2001)**

The third interview covered four areas of investigation: learning, tests, options and the future. As with the other earlier interviews questioning started with a very open question allowing a wide variety of responses. Students were asked to tell me about what they had learned through the year. Follow-up questions tried to find out what purpose students placed on this learning as well as how they would 'know' if they had learned something.



A second aspect of the 'learning enquiry' was to find out what the students would tell me about what teachers told them about learning, if anything. The third aspect went back to learning styles, although subsequently much of this data was not used in the analysis.

At the time of the interviews the students had just completed national Key Stage 3 tests several days earlier. I asked them to tell me about the tests, again trying to provide opportunities for a broad range of answers and without leading the students to an assumed sought for answer. I also asked them about their perceived ability to complete the tests before trying to find out what had taken place in the classroom in the weeks leading up to the tests in English, maths and science. Finally I asked them if they thought they had learned anything by taking the tests, what this was and why they might need to know this.

The third section on options looked at the actual options the students had selected or been selected for and their reasons for making their choices and followed on from the second round interviews when students were asked to select options without constraint.

The final section asked students to talk about their aspirations for the future: at the end of Year 11, beyond that, and any long-term dreams they may have. As I had in mind work on self-efficacy at the time, I also asked them about their beliefs in their competence to succeed in these goals. The interview questions are provided in Appendix D.

These interviews were tape-recorded and the recordings were transcribed in full. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes. All the interviews took place on school premises usually in areas where little or no interruption occurred although in Willow Way especially and to a lesser extent in Oak Park some interviews could be overheard by members of staff. In both these schools external noise along with poor sound recording equipment and/or positioning sometimes caused difficulty in the audibility of the tapes.

#### **Other data collection**

The four meetings with the students form the backbone of data collection but supplementary data were also collected. From these additional data it may be that

'multiple realities' are found as individuals may all see things differently (Burgess, 1985a). However, gathering these data has, in my mind, less to do with validating the data gathered from the students, helping to create a coherent picture and more to do with illuminating a different aspect or 'slice' of reality (Denzin, 1997). Alternative perspectives are helpful in building up a deeper, richer picture of the perceptions of reality that co-exist.

This thesis focuses on how pupils say they perceive their world rather than on an attempt to discover 'absolute' or 'objective truths' (Gitlin and Russell, 1994; Denzin, 1997). It takes as a central belief:

"... that it is what goes on inside the mind that is most significant."  
(Cullingford, 1991: p. 7)

While I do not wish to go so far as to declare, as Cullingford does that the "ultimate reality" is that which every individual experiences, primacy is given to the stories of the students because whatever others' views may be, ultimately it is what the individual thinks and how they filter others' views that form the way they make sense of and understand their world.

### *Student Records*

Access was sought to gather data from student records. In both of the state schools I was given unlimited use of all the records held on the students. Year reports, transfer reports from primary schools along with additional notes on individual students could thus be studied and permission was given for me to take copies of relevant documents on condition that confidentiality was maintained. At Oak Park records for all the pupils in the sample were available. This was not the case at Willow Way where several were missing. The private school was much coy about their reports. Year reports were provided for me to peruse while I was on the school site but concerns were raised about information of a confidential nature being provided to me. Although I asked if copies could be taken and was not overtly refused, these were never forthcoming. The results from the national Key

Stage 2 tests were also sought from the schools, but these were not available although in the two state schools teacher assessments were for some students.

### *Teacher interviews*

To provide a different perspective of learning and the learners who were members of the sample for this research, the views of some of the teachers of the students were sought. Recognising that communication of policy from policymaker to pupil will meet with many filtering and diversionary strategies along the way I wanted to try to understand how teachers may act as filters between education policy delivering messages about learning on the one hand and the pupil's reception of the message on the other. This aspect of research is not part of the main body of this study but was conducted to unearth some of the potential issues there may be arising from such filtration systems in order to test and/or qualify the links between policy and practice. Teachers, of course are not the only likely filters, but a study of all the ways in which messages from the top of the power hierarchy to the bottom mutate along the way lies beyond the scope of this study.

Additionally I wanted to gain teachers perspectives of the students I had been working with throughout the research to add another dimension to the study and provide some insight into the likely social relationships that might exist between staff and students.

The two state schools agreed to my interviewing members of staff although there was some apparent staff resistance to my doing so especially at Willow Way where some teachers ultimately declined on grounds of workload. The private school refrained from this aspect of the research, the staff members not wishing to participate.

Selection of staff was done on a 'practicality' sampling basis or the "art of the possible" (Wellington, 1996). I identified the teachers of the students in the two state schools from timetable information provided for me. Taking into account when teachers had non-teaching times on their timetables, I invited staff as appropriate to be interviewed, working with and through the contact teacher in each school. Interviews were conducted

individually at Oak Park but at Willow Way, for practical reasons, two sets of interviews were conducted with pairs of teachers.

The interviews, which were semi-structured, lasted about 30 minutes. They were tape-recorded but have not been fully transcribed. Notes were taken at the time of the interviews and these have been used to identify aspects of the interviews that appear useful in the analysis section of this thesis. These sections have then been transcribed to provide accurate quotations. A copy of the interview schedule is given in Appendix E.

### *Field Notes*

Depending on the time available, field notes were made either during or immediately after each visit to the schools. These were mainly of a subjective nature regarding the surroundings along with descriptions of incidents and informal conversations that took place during the visit.

### *Analysing and Interpreting Data*

As each round of data was collected, listened to and transcribed so too were there some preliminary attempts at analysing and interpreting the data. I acclimatised myself with the data through reading and re-reading, working and re-working. While I was doing this I considered aspects of the body of knowledge that helped me formulate interpretations of the data. The process followed that suggested by Haig (1987, 1996) as a reconstruction of 'grounded theory' where existing theories form an integral part of the formation of modified theories, acting as analogies from which to develop revised understandings. Tables were drawn up to record responses in particular ways; queries and notes were jotted down; diagrams were created and re-created to capture my thinking about possible linkages; and early attempts at writing case studies were made. Interspersed with analysis was rereading of the literature and the searching out of additional texts to help provide an increasingly broad array of 'orienting theories' with which to conduct 'constant comparison' between data and theory.

At times this was rewarding in so much as I enjoyed the challenge of discovering something from the data. The problem was that the 'something' seemed elusive and this brought on bouts of extreme frustration relieved in the main by a dose of social learning. Talking to others with experience of the difficulties connected to making sense of data frequently seemed to have the effect of re-motivating me in my own efforts. Further reading also provided sources for thoughtfulness on how to tackle the problem of interpreting and understanding the data in ways that helped me comprehend the world through the reinterpretation of the data in the light of my own experience and value (Saljo, 1988) and then find ways to communicate this 'comprehension' to an audience.

Ultimately a form began to take shape. I had constructed a number of texts often heavily skewed to a categorisation and quantitative presentation that, while providing me with a 'feel' for the commonality or individuality of the view expressed did not result in progressing my understanding and interpretation of the data. Some texts I constructed relied greatly on the use of existing theoretical frameworks. That is, I was conscious of the frameworks I was using to provide the scaffolding on which to analyse the data. In other texts categories emerged from the data, although if Haig (1987, 1996) is correct, these categories developed with tacit use of existing concepts. Yet other texts were written up as case studies of individual pupils. But while all of this had some form of meaning it did not result in any cohesive whole. Nor did I feel that I was capturing the essence of what it was that fascinated me about the individuality of the stories told except in those texts written as case studies, heavily impregnated with quotations from the pupils themselves. A little more social learning was required to nudge me into that which now forms chapters 5 to 11 of the thesis.

This learning took the form of supervisor scaffolding: a suggestion that I try to meld the work in particular ways. I had also come up with my own notion of making use of the chronological order of the questioning to form the chapters. Both approaches eventually proved useful. By uniting the chronological with the thematic a story began to emerge that covered the movement over time of the stories of the pupils, helping to highlight continuities and breaks where these occurred. But it also allowed a number of research

themes to be addressed under cover of one thesis, exploring the views of the learners from a number of different aspects. It created the space to allow consideration of a range of theoretical perspectives, synthesising theory with existing researcher constructs within the chapters. Across the chapters came the synthesis of theory with theory as learning frames and policy were explored from various perspectives.

As each chapter unfolded so too did the analytical tools to be used. Retaining some of the variety of the initial texts, realignment and modification of the techniques applied to analysis took place, while informal constant comparisons (Ball, 1991) were made with previous analytic attempts as well as in the light of my own experiences and values. The choice of tools for each chapter lay in what seemed a valuable story to tell from the data available, in what came to mind, in what seemed to 'work' to help me make sense of the data and to interpret and derive an understanding from the data. This included bringing to mind aspects of the 'body of knowledge' that I had stumbled upon, systematically sought out, or been referred to.

### *Writing Up*

As the writing progressed the stories were winnowed, formed and reformed. Ways of categorising the data emerged, developed, changed and sometimes were abandoned as other stories began to be told. Like Wallace et al (1998) I recognise that the resulting thesis captures only one means of making sense of the data, yet organising the work in the way it has been allows the students' stories to be used to help evaluate the apparent assumptions underpinning current educational policy and permits 'taken-for-granted' notions to be opened up for investigation and questioning. At the same time both individual stories and generalised overviews have been extracted from the data showing the simplicity and complexity of understanding and meaning making. Through the adoption of aspects of the work of Bourdieu, the role of structure and agency in actions has been elucidated.

As the writing progressed so new ways of exploring the data arose, as did different means of presenting the findings. As much as the methods adopted to acquire the data, sort and sift it, so the delivery of it to the reader forms an integral part of the thesis. Writing up is not the end but rather “it is part of the creative process of analysis” (Ball, 1991: p.187).

## **Section 2: Methodological issues**

Having described the research ‘design’ it is time to reflect in more detail on some of the methodological issues arising from the method of investigation used in this thesis. The notion of research ‘design’ is the first issue to consider, for ‘design’ brings with it its own problems. For anyone of a methodological persuasion that believes that high quality research must be planned out and designed fully in advance, the description of the method used in this thesis is likely to appear ill-structured, haphazard and problematic. However, although I have written that the research and researcher took on “a life of their own”, the direction in which the research ultimately went resulted from systematic analysis of data, including the empirical data gathered in schools as well as educational policy and theoretical texts. The process, although not rigidly adhering to the “rules of thumb” of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987), broadly adopts the principles they provide to guide data analysis. In grounded theory, research design cannot be mapped out in advance, except for decisions about initial data collection, as the shape of the research is influenced by ongoing analysis of the data collected which raises further issues or questions to be explored (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is the way in which this thesis has developed, but it is not the way it began.

One of the weaknesses of grounded theory is that, being concerned with the practice of analysing data in order to generate theory, it provides little help in making decisions about the initial stages of research: how inquiry begins, where to start data collection and what methods to use. As Strauss (1987) points out, grounded theory has no

“ . . . particular commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interests” (p. 5).

At best, the novice researcher is given the advice that the earliest decisions for data collection will be based on a general perspective, subject or problem area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This 'area' may be derived from existing theory, although only if such theory has been arrived at by a grounded approach (Strauss, 1987) but, Strauss continues, is more likely to result from a personal choice of the researcher to study a topic that "interests, intrigues, fascinates, bothers them" (p. 273). Haig (1996), in reconstructing grounded theory as a problem-solving process concerned with the "detection and explanation of social phenomena" (p. 282), claims inquiry typically starts with an ill-structured problem that the researcher has the desire to resolve. The structure of the problem will develop as the research progresses, through the identification of constraints on the problem. Kinach (1996) believes that, although Haig claims this to differ from Glaser and Strauss' work this is describing the same process as the 'constant comparative method' of grounded theory. If there was one key 'driving force', the area of interest that perhaps more than others intrigued me at the start of the research, it was puzzling over the way people come to be who they are, act the way they act, think the way they think. In my initial research proposal I spoke of my observations in the classroom and in 'industry' that had lead me to assume that whether pupils, teachers, managers or shop-floor workers, some people appeared to have a 'natural instinct' to learn, formally or informally while others did not.

To make sense of this I could turn to 'common sense' theories about 'innate intelligence', socio-economic background, gender or personality but the groups of people I was drawing together in my mind crossed the boundaries of many of the generalisations I was aware of. Students with special needs worked like Trojans, 'top set' pupils spent their days devising disruptive strategies; managers were intransigent, determined not to learn new 'skills', workers soaked up ideas, discussed, mulled over, thought through and created new ways of seeing the world and ways of doing; private school students sat politely, made notes and remained aloof from 'learning', urban 'problem' children questioned, shone, thrived on learning more. That is to say *some* did; others did not. What was it, I wanted to know that made the difference?



This then was my ill-defined problem, or topic for research. I was not, at this stage, *au fait* with 'grounded theory', so did not follow the 'rule of thumb' proffered in grounded theory to delay the use of literature so as not to contaminate or restrict one's thinking when analysing the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Glaser and Strauss (1967) have been accused of taking a *tabula rasa* view of inquiry yet as Haig (1996) points out they clearly state this not to be so. They do, however, advocate that existing theories and preconceptions are held in abeyance so only categories that emerge from the data are obtained. How such categories 'emerge' without recourse to prior understanding and theorising is not clear (Haig, 1996) but he suggests that analysis proceeds with the analyst having orienting theories that are adapted as new possibilities become visible through working with the data (Kinach, 1996).

As has been shown earlier, the early stages of my research involved exploring the existing body of knowledge connected with the ill-defined problem. I also made decisions about empirical data collection. These decisions involved aspects of grounded theory discussed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), making use of "insight" and "generative questions" arising from both "experiential data" and my analysis of academic texts. Reflecting on the processes with hindsight, there is, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest, much similarity in the processes I was using to review literature, with those used to analyse data of an empirical nature. Categorisation of aspects of the literature was made; generative questions were asked to compare works against each other and against existing experiential data. Memo's, in the form of short papers, were written to help clarify thinking through organising a mass of ideas. A form of theoretical sampling took place where salient questions arising from the reading of one text provided direction for further reading. Later "theoretical sampling" occurred as I sought ways to aid thinking when analysing the interview data as well as educational policy documentation. New questions or 'orienting theories' became apparent and guided where I was to look next. This process also involved social interaction (Pollard with Filer, 1996) as others, especially my supervisor and fellow research students provided suggestions for further study.

### *Data collection*

As stated in Chapter 1 the focus of the study is on Key Stage 3 pupils in English secondary schools. The selection of which school and which students to study was made partially for pragmatic reasons, but also because of the generative questions that arose from reading aspects of the body knowledge and may be regarded as a form of theoretical sampling. In grounded theory it is suggested that successive sampling occur dependent on the categories that 'emerge' from the data and the generative questions that arise from the analysis. But my 'orienting theory' was to explore in depth over a period of time, the same group of young people as one of the questions that intrigued me was the stability, or otherwise, of the frames of reference they may hold.

Phenomenography uses empirical method and explores how the researched view the world, usually by interviewing the researched in ways that encourages them to be reflexive. The method tries to describe people's conceptions of the world, studying how they experience, interpret and understand phenomena and aspects of the world (Marton, 1997). It aims to create:

"... a picture of the variation in human conceptions of phenomena in the world. The outcome ... results in a description of categories depicting conceptions of reality." (Saljo, 1988)

My particular interest in phenomenography was in its stated aim to understand how the researched viewed their world, or in the case of this research, the world of learning through the promotion of reflexivity, by interviewing. I especially wanted to provide an opportunity for young people to reflect on their thinking about learning to provide insights for adults into their ways of viewing the world. Other means of gathering data were considered, for example observing classroom practice, as this is suggested as a means of triangulation (Denzin, 1997; Seale, 1999). However, observation addresses behaviours or practices rather than meaning or understanding, which is the focus of this study. Observations often provide an insight of a young person's world from the perspective of

an adult's world (Burgess, 1995) and these worlds may be socially and culturally distinct (Arksey and Knight, 1999). The meanings children attach to their experiences may differ from those adults assume them to make (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). In order to understand the world from a young person's perspective it is important to listen to the views of the children (Lloyd-Smith and Davies, 1995; Arksey and Knight, 1999; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000).

From my readings of the literature it seems that the most likely way of gathering empirical evidence for a qualitative study of this kind is through unstructured or semi-structured interviews. Following my pilot study, however, I had begun to consider the constraints my semi-structured interview techniques had on the 'voice' of the young people whose stories I claimed I was interested in revealing to provide balance with those versions of young learners dominated by the adult world. I wanted to find a way to allow young people to tell a story about themselves and themselves as learners that made my own preconceptions and subsequent structuring in ways that the pilot interviews had done, less obtrusive. Influencing my thinking on this was the works of Gitlin and Russell (1994) who claim that they have attempted to give 'voice' to those traditionally silenced. To this extent I too wanted to provide an opportunity for young people to be listened to and heard although in this particular piece of research I would not claim to go beyond 'voice' to empowerment, for this lies outside the purposes of the work. Delpit (1988) speaks of the 'silenced dialogue' in terms of colour, but her thinking resonates with mine on grounds of age, and maybe class and gender too. She introduces the notion of power and its role in determining the legitimate language that is regarded as worth listening to and by whom. To Bourdieu 'legitimate language' is regarded as that of the dominant classes (Jenkins, 1992).

My aim was to be able to communicate with the young people by allowing their own language infiltrate that of my own. I tried to ensure, especially during interviews, to adapt my language to their own, to listen carefully as described in the process of witnessing (Ropers-Huilman, 1999), to the words they used to tell their stories and to formulate further probing questions through reiteration of their diction. This also allowed me to

practice 'skills' of questioning introduced to me through practical 'coaching' courses as part of my past experience. I also adapted an approach described by Rassool (1999) as a means of collecting data. This is the approach described, and the results analysed in Chapter 5. By asking students to construct their own stories, without intervention from myself, I attempted to provide, early in the research, a certain freedom from constraints I might introduce in later sessions. I allowed the researched 'a voice', yet in assuming permission to be required for this to occur, I disclose my own assumptions about the power relationship between researched and researcher and perhaps between young and old.

The 'voice' given to the young people in this research is about providing an opportunity for students to express their views on learning. It has not been an attempt to empower young people to take action to make changes in their lives. This was not the intent of the research. The power stayed firmly with the researcher and as such a stance of 'authoritative' voice (Hadfield and Haw, 2001) was adopted. That is, young people were listened to because I believed they were "in the best position to talk about being (a) young (learner)"; because I believed they could "tell professionals about their experience in a way that is meaningful"; because I believe that "professionals (often) have few opportunities to (take the time) to hear young people". But I have concerns about whether young people can "get things changed by getting their 'voices' heard" (Hadfield and Haw, 2001). On this last point my concern is especially related to external researchers, not involved in action research who have not the resources either materially or in time to work with young people to support them in their pro-activity. This uncovers my own assumptions about the limitations of the young researched and their 'need' for adult guidance, yet it seems irresponsible to raise the hopes of young people that they may be able to make changes in a world that often is not prepared to allow for such changes to be made (Hadfield and Haw, 2001)

There are however, dangers in attempting to listen to young people and hear what they have to say. Firstly, in the writing the author may use the 'voice' of the young to promote her own agenda, as too might the reader(s) of the text. This may result in the 'silencing' of

voices as might a second danger, where it is assumed that the voice of *a young person* of a particular 'category' is the voice of *all young people* in the category. Thirdly, the voice may not be authentic being a presentation of the self dependent upon the image the actor wishes to portray to the audience (Goffman, 1959). It may be "an outright lie"; it may be "playing up to an audience; or it may 'not (have) been properly articulated" (Hadfield and Haw, 2001). And the voice may be a re-iteration of the 'voice' of others, a ventriloquation of powerful others (Wertsch, 1991).

With these reservations in mind, the 'voice' presented in the thesis arises from a tension between the dominant voice of the researcher, an echo of her interests and the dominated voices of the young people, all of whom elected to be interviewed but who had little choice in the questions asked, though they had at least some freedom in the responses made.

### *Analysing data*

Phenomenography provided a means of analysing the data through codification and counting. According to Saljo the categories are worked out as a result of the data during the research rather than being pre-determined. Data are gathered minimising the amount of pre-selected questions being used. The interviews should be tape-recorded and these recordings should then be transcribed verbatim. When analysing the transcriptions the interviewer should 'bracket' preconceived ideas so responses are not judged as to how well they fit the preconceptions. The researcher should look for similarities and differences between the ways the phenomenon is viewed by the respondents. Groups of descriptions will emerge and these categories may then be used to determine the frequency of the categories (Marton, 1997). This approach bears the hallmarks of grounded theory and, as with grounded theory, Haig's (1987; 1996) argument that 'emerging' categories only become visible because of prior theories or assumptions that the researcher holds, needs to be borne in mind.

However, like Tizard and Hughes (1991) the analysis of data by quantifying codes left me dissatisfied; like them I had the:

“... feeling that our codes were insufficiently sensitive to bring out the relationship which we felt existed between the kind of activity and the quality of talk.” (Tizard and Hughes, 1991: p.30)

Yet I have not let go the classifiable and quantifiable but have used this as a part of the analysis of the data for it has provided one means of organising the mass of data in ways that allow for questions to be raised and possible interpretations to be considered. The numeric approach helps to show how representative and widespread particular instances are and provides greater balance than selective anecdotal evidence alone (Seale, 1999).

Seale (1999) warns that both anecdotal evidence and counting may be used in ways that mislead and suggests that there is a need always to look for examples that fit a preconception but also for those that do not. A systematic approach that aims to assist the researcher to do just this is constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Seale, 1999). Here as data is coded into categories the researcher critically analyses as she codes, asking questions of the data, noting down similarities and differences, exploring the properties connected with the categories, looking for data that fits existing categories and those that do not. As the process continues the ‘orienting theories’ that the researcher began with are modified and refined (Haig, 1996) and additional research, time and resources permitting, is undertaken to further modify and refine the new ‘orienting theories’. This is the process that followed from the first round of interviews in this research. For example, notions of intelligence, perceptions of ability and motivation were part of my repertoire of ‘orienting theories’ that underpinned the questioning in the first round of interviews<sup>4</sup>. Working on the data gathered from the first round of interviews, transcribing and doing some provisional coding and interspersing this with a critical analysis of educational policy, and likewise coding this, I began to generate questions around the role of assessment and judgements in developing perceived ability and how this

may interact with motivations. The second round of interviews explored some of the new 'orienting theories' and questions. Following analysis of this new data, linked again to further analysis of relevant literature, the third round of interviews included exploring how pupils' made sense of tests and how they described their experiences of them. This provided a richer source of data with which to make constant comparison. Thus constant comparison was carried out intra-individually, across gender, prior achievement, socio-economic and school groups as well as with 'orienting theories'.

### *Writing up*

Following the constant comparative method, writing the theory should be "relatively straightforward" (Seale, 1999) as categories provide the chapter headings, properties the section headings and the coded data examples to illustrate. Strauss (1987) recognises it is not so easy. As Ball (1991) points out, so too, Strauss, that writing up is a part of the discovery - or creative - process. Strauss goes on to suggest that, while the ideal may be to have a "fully complete" analysis prior to writing up, the reality is more likely that as writing proceeds so areas requiring further investigation and integration will become apparent to the author and will result in the need for further work. But, as Strauss also comments, a balance needs to be struck between continually "tinkering with the product" (p. 214) and placing it in the public arena for analysis from others perspectives. Strauss' notion of the "fully complete" analysis with a final theory, is confusing given that, as Haig (1996) points out, Glaser and Strauss (1967) write of theory as "an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: p. 32).

This thesis has been written with the underpinning assumption that it is not a perfected final product but rather that it provides a foundational exploratory study from which further development may occur. In the concluding chapter I will consider how my findings have resulted in increased understanding and acknowledge the limitations of the

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<sup>4</sup> These 'orienting theories' were present at the start of the research, but were influenced also by reading the literature, see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, and 'emerged' as an element in students writing, see Chapter 5.

understandings, providing scope for further structuring of a less but still relatively, 'ill-defined problem' (Haig, 1996).



## **Chapter 5: Learner Identity Through Pupil Voice**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the descriptions pupils wrote of themselves at the first meeting with myself, as researcher. Six of the twenty-five pupils were unable to attend these introductory group sessions so that the analysis in this chapter is limited to the eighteen students who took part in one of three group sessions plus one further student who was unable to attend the group session but was available shortly afterwards and who chose to speak with me, while I scribed rather than writing his story for himself.

To fit into each school's practical considerations, the groups had a varying amount of time allocated for the first meeting, the variation being both in terms of the physical amount of time available and its position in the day of the learner. One group was allowed two hours of standard lesson time; one was given about one hour of school time usually allocated for sport and individual work; and one school permitted the meeting to take place in the pupils' lunch hour, giving the students about half an hour to complete the task.

At the start of each session I explained who I was and gave a brief outline of the research I was doing along with my reasons for wanting to do the research. I also spoke to the pupils about their role in the research. In two of the three group sessions plus the one-to-one session with a student I gave quite limited information about the research as I did not want to influence their descriptions by telling them too much about my thinking. At the third group session, however, a member of the school staff initially stayed with the group as a 'scaffold'. He encouraged the students to ask questions of me so that they were able to make informed decisions about their commitment to the research and it was only following the initial meeting that they and their parents chose whether or not they would continue participating in the project. Although the students were reticent while the teacher was present, on his leaving they followed his advice and interrogated me. While I attempted to refrain from telling them "what I wanted to know" I was conscious that this protracted introduction may affect the resulting outputs from the activity. This group was also the

only group to ask whether spelling and grammar were important or whether they should concentrate on the ideas. I told them that it was the latter that was of most interest to me. All groups were told that they could communicate with each other if they so wished but that each report should be about their thoughts about themselves. Most students at some stage spoke a little with others. Again this may be reflected in a 'social' iteration of their views.

### **Overviews of pupils**

The young people were asked to provide me with a description of themselves and themselves as learners. An overview of their responses are provided in Table 5.1, Willow Way, the urban school; Table 5.2, Oak Park, the rural school; and Table 5.3, Beech Hill, the private school. As the focus of the research is on exploring the learner and learning identities of the students the students stories have been arranged to show a) how the students described themselves; b) what they had to say about themselves as learners; and c) what they said about their understanding of learning. Additionally, the students have been organised within prior achievement bands. These bands have been constructed by taking pupils cognitive ability test scores and their Key Stage 2 achievement levels together. A more detailed analysis of students' prior achievement is given in Chapter 6. Within each prior achievement band the students are then organised by socio-economic status group. These are described more fully in Chapter 6 and are based on Goldthorpe's (1987) class schema that identifies "service", "intermediate" and "working" classes on the basis of occupational function and employment status. For the purposes of the Tables 5.1 - 5.3 where the parents of a student have differing positions in the class schema, the higher grouping has been given.

Name	SES	Themselves/their 'worlds'	As learners	On learning and formal education
Prior Achievement Band: 70-89; Below Key Stage				
Diane	Working	Identifies herself through name age and school; the names and quantity of friends; her favourite music; her liking for hair and beauty activities, disco's and reading; and her friendly, "noisy" personality.		
Kevin	Inter-mediate	Identifies himself through name, and age; family names and occupations; pets; his interest in playing football with friends, for the school and for a local team; his support for a national football club; and his interest in playing computer games.	He regards PE to be his "best" subject, with music his "worst".	
Darren	Service	Identifies himself through his liking for working on computers; his dislike of some TV; and especially his health problems.		
Wendy	Service	Identifies herself through name, age, school, pets, named friends, favourite book, music and film, and her liking for art.	Has 'ability' in 'healing'.	School could be improved.

Table 5.1: Overview of pupils' descriptions of themselves and themselves as learners: Willow Way urban school

Name	SES	Themselves/their 'worlds'	As learners	On learning and formal education
Prior Achievement Band: 90-109; Expected for Key Stage				
Rachel	Working			
Una	Working			
Edmond	Inter-mediate	Identifies himself through name, his interest in sport and TV and the 'different' person he is in and out of school.	He likes PE, English, science, and games, disliking geography, maths, German.	
Vince	Service	Identifies himself through name, dislike of a family member, and his liking of home, friends, sport, a national football club, computer games and TV		He likes school.
Prior Achievement Band: 110+; Above Key Stage				
Matthew	Inter-mediate	Identifies himself through name, age and location of home; location in the family, activities with friends, liking for football and computer games, and his health.	Has ability in maths and sport but not in music. He finds maths and French easy; and German, science, music, hard. He prefers PE and games.	
Tracy	Inter-mediate			

Table 5.2: Overview of pupils' descriptions of themselves and themselves as learners: Oak Park rural school

Name	SES	Themselves/their 'worlds'	As learner	On learning and formal education
Prior Achievement Band: 70-89; Below Key Stage				
Barry	Working	Identifies himself through stories about family members, his pets, possessions, and liking for some sports, computer games and TV	He prefers English and maths liking less written and more practical work.	School is "OK" but critical of bullying, use of time, detentions and uniform.
Kelly	Inter-mediate	Identifies herself through age and location of home as well as locating herself within her family, through pets, her liking for a particular TV programme and her desired future as a model.		
Flo	Service	Identifies herself through the naming of friends her liking for art, her role as librarian and her shyness.	She likes art and dislikes maths; has difficulty with reading and spelling but is improving with help; and finds maths hard.	
Prior Achievement Band: 90-109; Expected for Key Stage				
Keith	Inter-mediate	Identifies himself through age, school and quantity of friends.	He is quite a good learner (top sets except for history) finding most challenging: maths, science, German and English and least challenging: lifestyle, classics and geography, the last of these being his favourite subject.	Teaching at the school is good and the teachers "nice" as in not strict.

Name	SES	Themselves/their 'worlds'	As learner	On learning and formal
Isla	Service		She tends to enjoy learning but loses concentration where peer behaviour is poor. She prefers drama, German and French, enjoying learning new languages but dreads geography and history where she believes herself to be less able than other learners in her class.	
Jenni	Service	Identifies herself through age.	She has learning difficulty with spellings that affect her learning and has had help. Some lessons she finds quite hard, but learns drama and classics quite quickly. She is not a "brilliant" learner but has 'taught' self in eg plaiting and whistling	She enjoys school.
Prior Achievement Band 110+; Above Key Stage				
Isaac	Service			
Katy	Service		She puts in more effort if there is enjoyment, only doing what she wants to do so if she doesn't enjoy an activity she may have lower results. She finds some lessons hard but increases her effort, as she is concerned with not wishing to be in a lower set or be regarded as stupid. She usually enjoys lessons, finding out new things and taking part in new activities. She particularly enjoys English and drama.	She links enjoyment to the teacher.
Marie	Service			

Table 5.3: Overview of pupils' descriptions of themselves and themselves as learners: Beech Hill private school

Name	SES	Themselves/their 'worlds'	As learners	On learning and formal education
Prior Achievement Band: 90-109; Expected for Key Stage				
Briony	Service	Identifies herself through name, location of home, her family, her broad range of interests including animals, sport, travel, reading, creative writing, watching films and going to shows, activities with her friends, her uncertainty about her future in terms of occupation, and her desire to continue to travel. Desires increased independence but regards friends and family as important for personal happiness and wellbeing.	Enjoys learning and believes this to be an important attitude to maintain motivation. Interested in religious beliefs, linking this in part to her family history.	Conceptualises learning as more than formal education to include learning how to be a team member through sport; and learning from travel and hobbies. Links enjoyment with effort, subject, teacher and type of learning.
Nigella	Service	She sets herself high standards and recognises the need to work hard in order to achieve her goals.	She sets herself high standards and recognises the need to work hard in order to achieve her goals.	Thinks everyone has a different way of learning and that learning takes place beyond formal education including travel, hobbies and socially from meeting and talking with other people. She links the teacher to enjoyment and motivation as well as believing that enjoyment and motivation is also dependent upon personality type, background and ambition. Friends and family are able to encourage learning but is mainly about individual choice of action.

Name	SES	Themselves/their 'worlds'	As learners	On learning and formal education
Prior Achievement Band: 110+; Above Key Stage				
Felicity	Service	Identifies herself through name, location of home, locating herself within her family, through her pets, her friends as well as peers she does not like, her broad range of interests including sport, reading, writing, art and cookery, and through physical characteristics.	She compares herself unfavourably with her 'brainy' brother. She spends time not actively involved in lessons, planning a book she is writing. She has been involved in a range of learning activities for musical instruments and drama but no longer does so.	She links enjoyment with interest, structure of teaching and teacher ability to control class
Olivia	Service	Identifies herself through name, location of home, location within her family, her range of interests including sport, art , performing arts and travel	Enjoys learning new things and interesting facts but does not like repetition of that already assumed to be learned.	Learning more likely to occur in a friendly environment.
Sophie	Service			
William	Service	Identifies himself through name, family membership, location of home, friends and through interest in sailing, IT and holidays.	Prefers positive teaching methods where he is more likely to be relaxed. Has learning difficulties with spelling, but not with reading and he does not believe the difficulty affects his learning.	Critical of amount of time spent at school but believes learning is aided because teachers are competent, time is provided on school site for homework and there are good resources. He links enjoyment to perceived ability.



### *Some observations about the overviews*

Reading through the tables, from urban school, through rural school, to private school it is particularly noticeable how the nature of the descriptions the students use about themselves, change. The urban school pupils predominantly write in terms of names, family, friends and interests that are usually, although not exclusively, taken from out-of-school experiences. There is little sign of meta-cognitive awareness either in terms of what it means to them to be a learner or what it means to learn.

Rural school pupils are more likely to describe themselves as learners in terms of what they find difficult or easy, of what may be distracting, of their perceived abilities and of preferred learning style. Only Matthew, with 'above expected' levels of prior achievement and intermediate socio-economic status (SES), wrote of his perceptions of his abilities, from the urban school. Katy, a high achieving, high SES pupil at the rural school begins to make connections between enjoyment, effort and achievement. She also highlights her concern with achieving particular status in terms of ability positioning within her year group and more generally in her wish not to be regarded as "stupid". Although those pupils with lower prior achievement, along with Keith, ('intermediate' SES, 'expected' prior achievement), describe themselves using similar identifying factors as those pupils from the urban school, other pupils from the rural school have not included details about age, family, friends and likes and dislikes.

The pupils from the private school, on the other hand, have not only provided some details about family, friends, home life and interests, but have also written about themselves as learners as well as including some thoughts about the meaning of learning. Thus for instance Briony ('expected' achievement; service SES), as well as telling the reader about where she lives and with whom, her broad range of interests, her uncertainty about her hopes for the future, her desire for independence and the role of family and friends in her life, writes also of her enjoyment of learning and her belief that such a positive attitude to learning is necessary for continued motivation. She links her interest in religion in part to her family's religious history and conceptualises learning as more than formal education to

include learning through sport, travel and hobbies. Like Katy she links enjoyment to effort but she also thinks that the subject, teacher and type of learning activity may all be factors in enjoyment levels.

#### **Four illustrative texts**

To illustrate more fully the difference between the writing styles and data provided by the pupils four texts have been selected. The first three texts are all written by pupils that gained above 'expected' levels at Key Stage 2 for English, Katy (rural school) and Matthew (urban school) also scoring at this level for maths and/or science and scoring above 110 on a cognitive ability test. Nigella (private school) achieved expected level for maths and science and scored between 90 and 109 on the cognitive ability test she took which differs from that taken by Katy and Matthew. The fourth text is that of a boy achieving below 'expected' level at Key Stage 2 in all three subjects and whose cognitive ability test score was one of the lowest in the sample of students. Darren is a pupil at the urban school. His story shows the priority he places on his lack of physical wellbeing and is a reminder of the holistic nature of identity formation.

The texts of the other pupils used in the study are given in Appendix F. They are transcribed, verbatim. Such a presentation has been chosen deliberately. Firstly, I want the reader to have access to the exact presentations each individual gave of themselves and themselves as learners with little input from the researcher into what might be 'expected'. These are the 'voices' of the pupils without selection by the researcher as to what to retain and what to edit. The transcriptions made of later interviews are too lengthy to be practical to do this, but these vignettes are given as a flavour of the different presentations of pupils. Secondly, as one of the areas of concern of policy-makers is the literacy of pupils, there is an opportunity for readers to consider for themselves how different 'standards' of presentation may affect the view taken or judgement made about individuals. How might these young people be 'classed'? To what extent might the differences highlighted in the analysis be attributable to differing levels of linguistic skills; to what extent to 'tacit' knowledge of what is likely to be expected?

### *Katy*

On a whole I enjoy going to lessons and finding out new things and doing things for the first time.

There are some subjects, like English and drama, that I enjoy a lot and put effort in, more than I would if I didn't like a subject.

I think that if you like a subject, or not, has a lot to do with the person teaching you.

I'm the sort of person who only does things if I want to so in subject I don't like my marks are likely to be lower than if I didn't like that subject. There's some lessons that I find hard, mostly languages, but I try to concentrate harder so I don't end up in the lowest set. I think that's what keeps me trying, I don't want people to think I'm stupid so I do my best to do well in that subject.

### *Matthew*

About my self.

Hello my name is Matthew I am 13 my birthday is on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September. I like football and I support Newcastle. My mum is called Mandy and my dad is called Don. I got 1 sister she is called Kylie she is 10. I live in York square. I like going to town with my mates. And I like going to watch Borborough play even though they're rubbish. I'm allergic to cats. At school my favourite lesson is PE and games. I am good at maths and not good at music. I like on my playstation my best game is probably Gran Turismo 2. I am good at most sports. In football I play for the school and Borborough United center of excellence. I also play basketball for the school and rugby. At school I find German, science and music hard and maths and French easy.

### *Nigella*

Before I start writing about the lessons I enjoy etc, I will start by writing about the things I enjoy, out of school. The thing I probably enjoy the most out of school is horse riding, I have my own pony and go and see him whenever possible. I also enjoy lots of other sports like swimming, tennis and lots of other things, but as well as things like that I occasionally just like to sit down and read a book or talk with my family or go out with a friend. I think everyone has a different way of learning and taking things in, and I think you can learn in lots of different places about lots of

different things. I personally have never really thought about thinking and learning, I mean I could be in a lesson and work really hard and really understand what I have been doing, and then think that I have learnt a lot today, but I've never actually thought about learning in general but now I do I find it quite interesting. I think that you can learn from many different things, from being in a lesson in school, to going on holiday, you are constantly taking new information in and learning all about different cultures and ways of living. Even from our hobbies we learn things, like how to be around lots of different people, and working with animals who are obviously much different to us, and finding how to look after them and be around them. I think talking with people, whether it's your family or friends, or a stranger you have just met, you learn about different views and ways on how people get through life, and it's interesting to see how people work and who they have in their family. I especially think that learning about different people and educations and cultures can really get someone thinking about lots of different things, and looking at the different ways people learn is also very interesting. I find going to different countries and seeing what goes on there, extremely interesting, and love to travel as I have all my life. I was born in Colchester, in England, but then I ~~moved~~ went to Cyprus for a really short while, and then I moved to Germany for 5 years, as my ~~d~~ Dad was in the army. My parents, and my 3 sisters, ~~l~~ all like going to different countries and traveling so we have always been to lots of exotic ~~t~~ countries and I have always found it interesting finding out about them, and I hope to travel for a lot of my life. My ~~fave~~~~out~~ favourite lesson at school is History, I really enjoy finding out what has happened before <sup>I was born</sup> and about different people, and I just generally enjoy it. Although I haven't got any teachers that I really don't like, I think having a good and nice teacher really counts for what you learn. I think you could easily go from really enjoying a subject to really hating one, if they have a teacher they ~~reall~~ really don't like, and just don't want to learn from them. I think it also, kind of, depends on what kind of person you are, and what background you come from, really does contribute to how much you learn, or want to learn. I think it also depends on where you want to get in life, or what job you want. Say if you want to be something like a doctor or a vet, something that you need to work really hard to ~~t~~ get the grades that you need, I think if a person really wanted that job they would work hard for it, whatever their home situation was, although of course that would take a major part in how well they did. I then think that if someone had their mind set that they were useless and didn't want to get anywhere in life, they wouldn't bother trying to work and put the effort in. So at the end of the day I think it depends on you as a person, and whether you want to learn, Obviously it depends on what teacher you have but they can only do so much. Your parents, friends and family can encourage you but you are the one ~~w~~ who has to do it for yourself and make the effort. When I'm older, and basically during my whole life there is so much I want to do and experience,

and there are so many places I want to go and see, and I realize I have to work really hard to get where I want to and I've set really high standards in which I am determined to live up to. At the moment, although there is lots I know I want to do I really can't decide on what my main job is going to be, and I'll probably never decide but I know I will always try and do whatever I want. As I haven't said much about my family I'll just write something now. I have my Mum and Dad and 3 sisters called Grace, Harriet and Megan who are 14, 11 (12 tomorrow!) and 7. I get on with them all the same but like doing different things with each of them. We all sort of like similar things. Grace was born in Cyprus, Harriet in Colchester just 1 year and a bit after me and Megan was born in Tubney. Grace and Harriet both come here to Beech Hill with me. So as I better stop writing now but my basic conclusion about learning is that it is your own decision whether you want to learn and you can learn wherever and whenever, all over the world.

*Darren*

About my self!

I have bad eyes if you want to know what that is I have got a split retainer that is the lens in the back of your eye the lens which has all the light coming through I have asthma I have had loads of asthma attacks and they are not nice I have been in hospital because of that I have exams and that itches a lot and when I was little I was kept in bandages I'm allergic to dogs cats bees hay and that kind of thing I don't play football hardly anymore because of my eye can't do things like I did be for

things I like

I like going round my friends house and like doing things which can't do now and I like typing on my computer at home

things I don't like

I don't like watching wrestling every five minutes

The sample is too small from which to generalise but, in terms of lifelong learning, if it is important that young people 'learn how to learn' by being reflexive and self-aware of themselves as learners (Quicke, 1999) as well as being able to think and talk about the

process of learning (Claxton, 2000), then it becomes necessary to understand to what extent and why such apparent differences as seem to be highlighted here may occur.

### **The Class of 19: Pupils' Thinking**

Although we cannot know all that is in the young people's minds from the results of the above activity, we can assume that they have all shown us aspects of what is in their minds. This may be more a reflection of what is on their minds in the context of the moment, perhaps in part due to the influence of that moment, than a display of that which is most prevalent in their minds across time. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that that which they have spoken or written about came out of their minds, to a greater or lesser extent influenced by the minds of those present at the time of the activity. It is these descriptions that the analysis that follows, considers bearing in mind that the analysis is a construction of the author's understanding, giving a more detailed analysis of the stories than that provided in Tables 5.1-5.3. By reading the stories in order to discover how the young people speak of themselves through social structures school, home and family, peers, the 'world of work' and the 'rest of the world' as well as that of the person, in body and mind emerge. Through re-ordering the stories to take account of the structures the ways in which each of the structures are used by the individual to describe him or her self can then be identified, allowing then for each learner to be placed and re-placed in sub-groups. The results of this process are given below.

#### *School*

##### **An absent presence**

Kelly and Darren are notable here for the absence of reference to any aspect of school. For them, that which they relate to refers to aspects of their lives away from formal education, and while this does not show that they do not use school as an identifier for themselves, it does raise the question of the priorities on their minds at the time I met them. A re-read of Darren's story provides us with an 'easy', but not necessarily accurate assumption that his loss of sight along with other medical conditions, are of more

significance to him than school. This is what defines him, the boy he was and the youngster he can no longer be. Kelly comes packaged with no such easy explanation. Further exploration of her story is required for more to be revealed.

Although it is only Kelly and Darren who tell us nothing of themselves through school, Diane and Wendy also say little about the institution they spend a significant part of their life in. Diane names the school and speaks of children disliking school but says nothing of her own views on the matter; Wendy names and claims it could be improved but says nothing of how this might be done.

### **Affection and Disaffection**

Others, except perhaps for Kevin, tell us of the subjects they like, though whether they like them or prefer them (Rust, 1977) cannot yet be determined from their stories. Kevin writes of 'best' and 'worst' subjects, a term that may refer to his preference, his abilities, or something as yet undetermined. Conversely, some of the class reveal curriculum areas they do not like. Briony, Felicity, Katy, Nigella, Olivia, and William go on to provide their theories on why there is differentiation of affection across the curriculum. These reasons include teacher qualities including pupil management skills and pedagogy, grades attained and personal beliefs. Briony, Katy and Nigella go further with their theorising and link affection to effort, emphasising the role of intrinsic reward as motivator in their minds.

### **Critical analysis**

A number of the young people are critical of aspects of the school. While Briony, Felicity, Olivia and William find fault with either the length of time spent at school or particular members of the teaching staff, Barry finds fault, and suggests improvements, across a range of areas of the school. Keith and Vince, on the other hand, positively evaluate their teachers and Keith is also favourable in his judgement of the school.

### **Difficulty and Ease**

Flo, Jenni, Katy, Keith and Matthew describe themselves through subject areas they find easy, difficult or challenging, Flo and Jenni also pointing out that they have required additional help in the past to overcome some of their difficulties.

### **Ability**

The stories of some of the young people involve comment about ability relating to school. Thus Felicity, Isla, Keith and William all mention ability: Felicity and William in terms of its relationship to affection for subjects; Isla, Keith and William with regard to educational structures of grade or set; and Isla to dread.

### **Grades and Sets**

Katy joins the group of three children mentioned above in referring to grades or sets and like Felicity and William, links ability to liking for subjects, but Katy also adds another dimension to grades and sets when she writes of her desire not to be in a low set. Like Isla there is a fear, but where Isla fears she may be seen to be ignorant in relation to set mates, Katy dreads a lowly position in the year group.

### **Injustice**

One further theme of school life emerges from the stories of the 'Class of 19', that of injustice where pupils view teacher action as unfair against the person. Both Barry and William comment on this although Barry infers the injustice to be done to sub-groups or individuals within a class, while William refers to incidents of whole class punishment for individual or sub-group misdemeanour.



## *Home and Family*

### **An absent presence**

Diane, Edmond, Flo, Isla, Jenni and Katy do not reveal any part of themselves through reference to their home or family while Darren mentions only that he likes to type on his computer at home and Wendy speaks only of her pets.

### **Family membership and their role in the learner's life**

Others tell us of their family members, sometimes in brief descriptions such as their names, at other times with reference to the part they play in life outside school. While Vince tells us that he likes home, in terms of family membership we learn only that he dislikes his brother. From Felicity we find an earlier jealousy of her brother's ability and an ambiguity of parenting: protective mother and critical father. Briony regards her family as important for her emotional well-being while Nigella and Olivia comment on the role of the family in supporting learning.

## *Peers*

### **An absent presence**

No mention is made either of peers or friends by Edmond, Felicity, Jenni, Katy, Kelly and Olivia.

### **Friends**

Of the remainder of the 'Class of 19' all bar Isla, who does not mention friends, speak of friends whether merely mentioning their existence or commenting on their liking for socialising with them either in or out of school. For Briony her friends are, like her family, viewed as important for her emotional well-being while Nigella believes that not only is it possible to learn from friends but they are also able to encourage her to learn.

### **Peer behaviour**

Barry, Isla, Vince and William all write or speak of other students in terms of bullying or misbehaviour, although no one announces their status as 'bullied'.

### **Peer ability**

Isla uses her peers to compare her own academic abilities and finds herself lacking in some contexts. As we have seen, she describes the resulting emotion as one of dread when faced with these subject areas.

### **Peers as workmates**

Not only does Briony like to socialise with her friends and sees a role for them in her well-being, she also likes to work in groups though whether she refers to groups of friends or groups of peers cannot be determined. Vince is more specific in his liking for being in classes with his friends, but does not tell us whether this is so they are able to work together or to socialise.

### *The World of Work*

### **Future aspirations**

Several young people expand their existing world and look to their futures. Felicity and Kelly name specific career hopes, the former to be an author, the latter a model. Briony and Nigella are not so clear of their desired pathways although both want to travel. For Nigella, future aspirations for life in general and career in particular, will have an effect on one's views of learning.

## *Rest of World*

### **An Absent presence**

Isla, Jenni, Katy and Keith make no reference to a larger world than that of school, family and friends.

### **Affection and Disaffection**

Twelve of the 'Class of 19' reveal their liking for one or more activities out of school, that are not obviously linked to either peers or family. Darren writes only of a dislike of activity while Olivia and William mention activities they are or have been involved with but do not tell us whether this is pleasurable or a chore. The range and variety of activities students are involved in differs considerably amongst students.

### **Formal Activities**

Several of the young people are involved, or have been involved in formally structured activities: Briony, Felicity and Olivia in music and drama; Kevin and Matthew in football. Briony and Olivia speak in terms of grades achieved in music.

### **Cessation of Activity**

Both Felicity and Olivia have given up attending particular activities, Felicity linking this to a dislike for the teacher and the compulsion to practice, a deed she did not accomplish.

### **Geographical Horizons**

Barry, Briony, Nigella and Olivia describe themselves through holidays and travel, although while Barry describes a future holiday, the other three speak of experiences past and future as well as with a history of travel within their families.

## *Self*

All the class of course have described something of themselves through other aspects of society, but some students tell us more about themselves without reference to the social. For some this amounts to no more than their name, age or date of birth and these are not detailed below.

### **Physical Conditions**

We have already seen that Darren is pre-occupied with his ailing health, but Felicity and Matthew also mention aspects of their physicality in their descriptions of themselves. Additionally, Jenni and William describe themselves as dyslexic, the former believing this to affect her learning, the latter not regarding it as a handicap. Briony describes feeling tired and stressed, linking this to the long school week.

### **Personality**

Flo describes herself as shy, Diane conversely as noisy, while Edmond assumes he has told enough about himself through his likes and dislikes and concludes that he has at least two 'selves', one in school and one outside.

### **Ability**

Felicity, Isla, Jenni, Matthew and Wendy all explore themselves through the notion of ability. Felicity, Isla and Jenni all berate their abilities at least in some contexts, while Matthew both berates his and proclaims himself good dependent upon context. Wendy believes herself able to heal people but does not mention ability beyond this context.

Katy shows concern for others' perceptions of her ability, her claimed reaction to low achievement being to concentrate more and work harder in order to improve. Like Katy, Nigella appears to hold a belief close to that of government discourse that the individual is

able to continuously expand ability with effort, determination and a belief in one's efficacy to improve. This seems to be in contrast to Felicity who writes of her doubts about her ability to succeed at least in the context of authorship. Here seem to be examples of the different self-theories held by individuals that Dweck (2000) refers to in her work on achievement motivation as well as that of Bandura (1995) on the role of self-efficacy in determining the level of achievement attained by individuals.

### **Flow**

Olivia, in her description of 'adrenelin rush' created when she is happy doing particular activities speaks of the intrinsic reward and perhaps Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) idea of enjoyment and 'flow' that goes beyond the general feeling of mild affection described by likes and dislikes.

### **Making Sense of Their Worlds**

A number of students have attempted to provide causal relations between emotions, actions and beliefs. They have attempted to create theories to explain and make sense of concepts and their world. While Nigella's story privileges the theoretical, Briony, Felicity, Katy, Olivia and William all also to greater or lesser extent within their tales share with us some of their attempts to make sense of their worlds.

### **Structuring the Structures**

Having deconstructed the stories and re-constructed them by extracting variables from the texts while working within a pre-formed framework of social structure, further re-construction is now possible for a number of themes emerge from the categories.

Motivational issues reside within the learner talk of activities or subjects they like or do not like both in and out of school, aspects of their lives that they feel affection for or in some way are alienated from. As such they touch upon the notion that a reward for participating in an activity may be intrinsic. Although the gaining of an intrinsic reward,

such as 'the joy of learning' referred to in education policy documentation (DfES, 2001a) may not in itself be sufficient to motivate the person to action nevertheless for some learners their emergent theories of learning include the view that intrinsic reward affects their will to do. Similarly, some students suggest that extrinsic actions whether designed to be reward or punishment play a role in motivation and affection, while others have insufficient reward whether intrinsic or extrinsic to warrant the continuation of pursuing the activity and cease to do so. Critical analysis, when viewed as "strategic action" (Pollard and Filer, 1999) may be seen as the individual being motivated to respond to a structure in a particular way but it also resonates with the work of Sternberg (1990b) on what he describes as a judicial intellectual style. That is the individual likes to evaluate rules and procedures, enjoys judging existing structures and prefers problems where it is necessary to analyse and evaluate existing things and ideas. This alerts me to theories surrounding intelligence, especially, in addition to those of Sternberg, to the multiple intelligences introduced by Gardner (1993; 1994). It also relates to the next issue thrown up by analysing the young learner's writing, that of ability.

As we have seen some of the young people link their perceptions of their ability to the level of intrinsic reward they gain from an activity, though only William acknowledges that his perceived ability may differ from his 'actual' ability and in so doing reminds me of the work of Phillips and Zimmerman (1990) in the relative importance of perceived and actual ability. What is also highlighted by the students stories is the variety of ways that 'ability' is spoken of by individuals, not so much in whether they think they are high, low or mixed ability, but rather in terms of whether they imply it is an intrinsic trait in them as in Isla's dread of geography because she's "not that good at it", Jenni finding that some lessons are "quite hard" or Keith differentiating challenging and easy subjects. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1984) and Dweck (1986; 2000) suggest that how children make sense of their progress or lack of it, will affect their motivational levels. If they believe that a lack of success is attributable to their 'ability' they may select to avoid tasks they believe they are unable to succeed in. If they believe they are able to improve their competence through greater effort, they are more likely to try harder.

A third issue arising from the texts is that of 'personal issues' whether these are physiological or psychological and the part that differences in body and mind, perceived or actual, play on the actions and thoughts of the person. These are pertinent both to motivation and to ability, the former in their role in goal setting and the latter especially in the formation of the perceptions of ability. They are also central to any discussion surrounding the proclamation by the government that education has a dual purpose: that of personal fulfilment and growth as well as that of skilling for employment (DfES, 2001a).

The fourth theme that comes to light through the texts is the role of family and friends and other peers in the lives of the young learners. Families may be seen to provide support for learning, or for emotional well-being or they may arouse feelings of dislike and jealousy as well as ambiguities to be resolved. Additionally we are reminded of the cultural capital that may be provided by the family when we think of the variations in geographic horizons of the young people, in the occupations of their parents and siblings, and in the activities that families involve themselves in out of school hours. Peers may be a source of pleasure through socialisation, or pain through bullying or 'poor' behaviour, but they may also be yardsticks for the measurement of one's own ability and here the work of Rosenholtz and Simpson (1984) and Phillips and Zimmerman (1990) re-appears in mind with all the inference of the social construction of ability.

Finally, there are the aspirations mentioned by a small number of the class who speak of their hopes and dreams in terms of vocation: Briony and Nigella as yet uncertain of career but hopeful of travel, Felicity seeking to be an author and Kelly wanting to be a model. Nigella brings us full circle in her theorising as she connects learning to one's future aspirations for life and jobs, and thus we find ourselves back at motivational goals: why learn?

For the government, as for Nigella, the reason one may be motivated to learn, at least formally and during the years of compulsory education, is primarily for employment, although other rewards may be gleaned along the way. There may be some degree of

personal fulfilment and individual growth; there may be frustration and pain, but fundamentally, the reason is clear:

“To prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century competitive global economy, Britain must transform the knowledge and skills of its population. Every child, whatever their circumstances, requires an education that equips them for work and prepares them to succeed in the wider economy and in society.” (DfES, 2001a: p.5)

Chapter 6 provides us with a more detailed look at the potential role of the family and community in the lives of these students and their development as learners. Here the children are positioned in terms of capitals available to them through the home, their friendships, their worlds and through formal education. In Chapter 7 we explore how the young learners in this study make sense of why they should learn in school and attempt to place education in the broader context of their lives as to its relevance and importance to them and their life goals. Chapter 8 tries to elicit how the rewards they require in order to motivate them to learn change over time, that is, it explores the changing frames of reference that pupils may have with regard to motivation. In Chapter 9 we investigate the young people's perceptions of and about ability and we look at how testing and credentials, both at school and national level impacts on their thinking. Their aspirations linked to their talents and the socially available options are explored in Chapter 10. We turn once more, in Chapter 11, to view some of the young people as unique individuals, reconstructing their stories into case studies presenting a construction of the whole person, their identity and their career through the latter part of Key Stage 3.

But before we turn to discover the importance and purpose of learning in the lives of these young people, six additional students, who did not take part in the introductory activity require a mention. Isaac, Marie, Rachel, Sophie, Tracy and Una were all unable to attend the first session of the research in their respective schools, three because of prior arrangements or illness, and three because they were selected after a number of the original sample of students declined to agree to be interviewed. Two further changes occur during the course of the research: Diane leaves her school between the first and



second interview, and Tracy moves education establishments between the second and third interviews. But as we turn to ask the question ‘Why learn?’ at the start of the three rounds of interviewing, we have the stories of the ‘Class of 25’ on which to draw.

## **Chapter 6: Sculpting the Social Individual**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I have considered the views of each of the students in the Class of 25, in terms of how they describe themselves and themselves as learners. The students have been assumed to be meaning-makers, active learners, rather than passive, deficient and dependent objects (Pollard and Filer, 1999). But it is also necessary:

“ . . . to understand the social conditions, institutional arrangements, expectations, conceptualizations, forms of discourse and positioning which children experience.” (Pollard and Filer, 1999: p. 7)

Mahar (1990) suggests we need to understand how the individual is sculpted by social structures by trying to describe and analyse the origins and development of the individual. It is not only the social structures that require attention but also the social practices of a group (Nash, 1998; 2002) for as I have suggested in Chapter 2, the consequences of such practices may be the deliberate or inadvertent reproduction or change of structure and agency.

Secondly, Mahar (1990) states it is necessary to describe and analyse the social space in which the individual resides and the position of the individual within the social space. In the

“ . . . imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one, every soldier has a marshal's baton in his knapsack, and every prize can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything.” (Bourdieu, 1986)

Bourdieu argues that the system treats everyone as equal when, in fact their starting points are all different (Jenkins, 1992). In Chapter 4 we saw that proponents of the school effectiveness movement so prevalent in current education policy, while at once acknowledging that a person's background may affect their educational performance, also regard the socio-economic structures that a student finds themselves in as an excuse for academic 'failure'. Give the child the 'right' conditions in the school and the world will become his oyster. But what are the 'right' conditions if young people are not at the same place to begin with? Individuals have different 'cultural endowments' (Jenkins, 1992), built up through their rich histories, transformed and transforming their habitus, their actions and reactions to the situations in which they find themselves. Through Chapters 7 - 11 are traced and re-traced the complexities of young people's situations, their meaning-making, decision-taking and their rationale. We will see how outcomes are generated through interwoven threads of family, schooling, culture, self, each at once individual and social, unique and general, through freedom and constraint; choice and compulsion. This chapter explores the rich histories of the Class of 25. It shares with the reader that which the researcher has gleaned about the availability of capital resources available to the child through school, home and community and uses this to place the individual socially.

In this chapter I describe and analyse the schools, the families and the out of school experiences of the Class of 25 in terms of the capital resources they are likely to be able to make available to the young person, resources that provide the possibilities and constraints for action by the students. These resources not only provide the possibilities and constraints for action, but may also help to construct or prevent the construction of particular frames of reference that structure the ways in which young people think about and 'make sense' of learning.

## **Schools**

Each school is described firstly in the terms used by education policy makers: quantifiably. My own field notes are then used, along with my lasting memories of the three schools, to provide a richer description of the schools and their capital resources.

## *Willow Way*

### **The Measurable**

Willow Way is an 11-16 comprehensive school set close to the edge of a large urban new town in a relatively prosperous area of the south of England. The town is growing and, although the school had suffered falling rolls, it has in more recent years increased its numbers so that in January 2001 it had approximately 1300 pupils on roll. In 1999, when it was selected for inclusion in the research, about 30% of eligible pupils gained five or more GCSE A\* - C grades. The trend for these results between 1998 - 2000 was falling, but in 2001 approximately 33% of the students eligible to take GCSE examinations achieved five or more A\* -C grades. This is below both the Local Education Authority and the national average. The school's average points score in 2001 was low while the absence rate was high in relation to the other schools taking part in the research. It has not been judged favourably by OFSTED.

### **Researcher Images**

If I had to select one word to describe the overriding image of the school the one that springs most readily to mind is 'rough'. I remember the high wire fences, the scuffed furniture, the mud-caked chairs, the shouting, the desperation in some, though not all the teachers' voices, the violence of the children against the fabric of the school. Re-reading my field notes I note my memory to recall much of that which I wrote at the time, though it is noteworthy that it is the negative images I retain and regurgitate with such ease, rather than some of my more positive comments, both sets of which I shall now share with the reader.

"I arrived at the driveway to the school to find high, cheap metal fences and gates had been erected within the grounds. Being currently immersed in Goffman's "Asylum" (1961) I cringed at the significance of the fencing - though quickly reminded myself that on this occasion it was to keep vandals out (I felt

sure, given the problems the school has had over the years and the police presence at the last open evening I attended). Even so . . .

"I signed in and sat in a tiny foyer on a chair caked in mud. A series of bodies wandered in and out, some only as far as the office hatch, some - staff - with the pass number keyed themselves through the locked door.

(. . .)

"As lessons changed, children flooded the corridor through the doors from my perch. All seemed to go quiet, except for an adult or two pottering about (. . .) Two young pupils appeared - female - they were relatively clean but unkempt. One was clearly the leader. They headed toward a classroom door. The teacher's voice boomed for them to leave. They challenged the teacher, but retreated so they were now in my view as well as my hearing. The teacher appeared behind them, shouting for them to go to their lessons. They stepped toward him. He raised his arm and boomed 'Go!' Another adult looked startled, seemed to ask, with his eyes, what should I do, then dipped his head. Some more challenges between students and teacher, then the two girls retreat and head off, arm-in-arm down the corridor. The teacher disappears towards his classroom.

"Moments later I spot the two girls wandering past the 'entrance' door, outside. They may have 'gone' but it wasn't to where their lessons were occurring. A short time elapsed and I hear the office lady shouting one of the girl's names, asking her where she's going - telling her to come back.

"Twenty minutes late, Miss Edmonds [with whom I am to meet] arrives. She is in PE attire, looking dishevelled. (. . .) As we walk past the teacher's door, the teacher is outside his class talking quietly to a girl who is crying . . ." (Field notes, February 2000)

"In general the school seemed quieter than [at other times]. Nevertheless, waiting in reception, drama was still not lacking. A worried looking adult raced

into the Medical Room with a child, apparently having a nose bleed but who had, in fact, been punched in the face. A couple of parents arrived with pupils, children signed out the toilet key. Other pupils, in the corridor, played hide and seek, apparently some time after others appeared to have gone to lessons. Shortly after lessons commenced a teacher emerged to ask the office staff to get help as he was having problems in the class (. . .)

“At break there was some degree of shouting, both an adult male and female seemed to be in confrontation with some children, but things quietened fairly quickly.

“After break the noise level rose to a crescendo as pupils hovered around the exam room. Teachers yelled instructions, children yelled back.

“Lunchtime was spent quietly observing the comings and goings of the children outside the window. I was struck by the ‘uniform’: dark trousers, trainers (not allowed!) or clumpy shoes, a few with sweatshirts but mainly heavy padded jackets or tracksuit tops although the weather was extremely warm . . .” (Field notes, May 2000)

“I arrive as the children are arriving. They wander obliviously in front of the car. They ‘hold’ their positions as I try to park, while they stand in the way (. . .)

“Once into reception there is the usual friendly welcome and as I make my way to Miss Edmonds’ office I bump into her coming the other way. She is bright, bubbly and apologises for not being organised but says for me to make myself a coffee (. . .) I later learn Miss Edmonds is leaving at the end of term (. . .)

“Various staff members I know pass by - generally relaxed and smiling (. . .) the Head looks tired, worried . . .” (Field notes, May, 2001)

## *Oak Park*

### **The Measurable**

Oak Park is an 11-18 Technology College located in a market town in the south of England and similar in size to Willow Way. In terms of GCSE examination results, approximately 60% of eligible pupils gained five or more A\* -C grades in 1999. This figure was fairly static between 1998 and 2000. In 2001 the figure rose to 66%, above both the Local Education Authority and the national average as it has been consistently between 1998 and 2001. Both its average points score and absence levels fell between the other two schools taking part in the research. It receives good reports from inspections and has received recognition in national quality schemes.

### **Researcher Images**

For Oak Park my one word descriptor would be 'comfortable'. My memories conjure up a 'homeliness', quietly, efficiently, just getting along. I might even consider it to be 'average': nothing harsh, nothing suave. The school is approached down a leafy lane where the detached houses stand aloof, distanced from the stark concrete 'council' houses amongst which Willow Way resides. No wire fences, no gates, no locked doors, only low walls and openness. Yet my field notes, while reflecting my memories to a degree, also highlight some negative features of the school as the reader will see.

"The room is painted bright yellow - an English room with neat work displayed and words pinned up around the walls. The décor - plaster/woodwork - has been 'bashed' a bit. The noise from the grounds (it is lunchtime) is moderate and there is a quiet buzz from the other rooms as the youngsters entertain themselves." (Field notes, February 2000)

"There is a calm air about the school. Youngsters are already in lessons and a small number come to the school office. They are assertive but in a quiet, polite and mature way. The children and the office staff exude calmness, civility and warmth.

“During the morning a teacher in a nearby classroom tells her Year 7 class that they seem to have come to school with the idea that they do not have to work - she corrects the impression giving them clear indication of what is expected of them and what the consequences of alternate action will be.

“Mrs Roberts [my contact in the school] checks I’m OK. Another member of staff pops in (. . .) and jokes about the demise of the school. It’s a confident, relaxed banter.

“A child next door is upset. Calmly the teacher tries to sort [the problem] out (. . .) all peacefully.

“Between lessons the noise level rises but it’s more ‘excitement’ than ‘anger/aggression’.” (Field notes: May 2001)

### *Beech Hill*

#### **The Measurable**

Beech Hill is a private, selective school that offers education for young people aged 10 - 19. It is situated in a city in the south of England. It has about 500 pupils on roll. In 1999 around 90% of the pupils eligible to take GCSEs gained five or more at grades A\* - C. The trend between 1998 and 2000 was relatively static but in 2001 this rose by about 10% to approximately 99%. The school results are well above the average for the Local Education Authority and close to twice the national achievement rate. Comparatively amongst the schools used in this research the average points score of pupils at GCSE is high and absence low.

#### **Researchers Images**

‘Splendour’ would be an apt single word description of my memories of Beech Hill School. Although the walls and gates were high, it is not these that haunt my mind but the



huge administrative building and landscaped grounds, the high ceilings, chandeliers, polished floors and enormous windows and doors. Everywhere space and elegance. As my field notes remind me, this elegance includes the tall, graceful schoolgirls walking along the drive, scarves draped around their shoulders, like the young people at the urban school, oblivious to the traffic sharing their pathway. The field notes again, confirm my memory but also add some reminders of thoughts no longer brought easily to mind.

“On arriving through the school gates, the size of buildings became apparent (. . .) The entrance of the [administrative building] was one of high ceilings, pillars, marble, stone, grandeur but as I entered the Reception area I noted the chaotic mound of parcels/boxes, showing the working side of the school (. . .) [My contact teacher] showed me the ‘view’: the grounds, the lakes, the summer house, and then pointed out the sweep of school buildings (. . .)

“In the dining room shrieking girls were frowned on by the contact teacher - a sign of bad behaviour, he said, they had been spoken to a few days before and clearly one of them had not taken the message to heart; it would be picked up later. In general the children were polite and relatively quiet (. . .)

“[On the way to the contact teacher’s office] through huge wooden doors, carpeted stairs, worried young men kept asking questions, looking almost too frightened to speak (. . .)

“On the way out to the car a girl persisted in questioning the contact teacher regarding a question in a general knowledge quiz that had taken place that afternoon (. . .)

“Next day, the children are waiting in an annexe to the library, quietly chatting. We enter The Study - not before I have nearly slid over on the highly polished wooden floors! Chandeliers and large windows; elegance everywhere. The sheen of the table was staggering but the draught from the window remained cold!” (Field notes, March 2000)

“Interviews take place in music room - beautiful, exquisite ceiling, dainty chairs and grand piano alongside modern electronic equipment.

“Very quiet, no disturbance.” (Field notes, June, 2001)

### *Observations on the Measures and Images*

Even as I moved from school to school over the months, interviewing the students, I was acutely aware of the enormous difference in impact each school had on me, not only through the visual and auditory senses, but on the emotions and the reactions of the mind. That wire at Willow Way was not in place to envelope me, ensnare me, imprison me, yet how despondent, closed in and trapped they made me feel as I drove through the gates, passed the chain fencing and arrived at locked doors. How different my upbeat mood as I drove to the rural community in which nestles Oak Park: open and free; or the awe-inspiring Beech Hill, itself enclosed by high perimeter walls and gates, yet are these walls not more symbolic of dominance and power such to provide the quiet assuredness of wealth? Bourdieu's claim that the capital resources available to individuals differ not only in financial terms but in cultural, social and symbolic ways, ring out again and again. From the acceptable behaviours of the students, to the furnishings and fittings, through the structures of the buildings and the grounds that house them, to the boundaries that protect them and the students who perform in them, variation in capital is writ large within my mind. But it is more than this; it is in the very language I use to describe the schools, the choice of phrase, the terminology: rough, comfortable, splendid; yelling, peaceful, quiet; concrete, leafy, polish; ensnared, open, assured. Not only do I, in my mind take in the measurable statistics to place these schools within the field of education, so too do I use my senses as I perceive on visiting them. The variation in capital goes beyond the financial and the qualification, it lives and breathes within the very fabric of the structures that surround these children daily. Or does it live and breathe within the author as she sees it from her position in the field? Do the descriptions merely show the author as comfortable, at one with the location of Oak Park whereas she feels an alienation from both Willow Way and Beech Hill? An alienation borne of distance of habitus and capital;

of experience and understanding. Yet the locked doors, the caged grounds, the aggressive stances are real, just as are the statuesque structures, the landscaped grounds and quiet air.

It is probably prudent to explicate at this point, that the 'measurable' measures are no less problematic than the images in determining the essence of the schools and the capitals they may be able to endow upon their charges. It is necessary to consider by whom, how and for what purpose the measures have been selected as the legitimate means of evaluating institutions. Just as one may need to consider the position of the author when describing a perception so must one consider the place of those determining the quantifiable characteristics to be used to judge and categorise (Ball, 1997).

Reservations about the legitimacy of the judgements made notwithstanding, taking the measures and images together it can be seen that the educational institutes to which the various students belong may be positioned in relationship to one another "by virtue of the access they afford to the goods or resources (capital) which are at stake in the field." (Jenkins, 1992) Willow Way, with its low productivity of academic credentials stands subordinate to Oak Park and Beech Hill, these respectively earning higher and higher positions in terms of one form of cultural capital, namely formal qualifications. Nor is Willow Way able to offer more subtle forms of cultural or symbolic capital as shown in surroundings, aesthetic appeal, manners and even dress. It is an institution lacking status and prestige, both of which appear to rise as we move through Oak Park to Beech Hill.

Through the formal education institutions the pupils are categorised, but not only are they categorised so are they surrounded by varying capitals, cultural, social, symbolic, financial. There appears to be an institutional 'habitus' operational within each school; a way of being, according to Bourdieu created and recreated through interaction with structures and histories (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990). One structuring agency that provides much of the early history of the pupils is the family and it is to this social structure I turn. In considering the family, Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', as introduced in Chapter 3 are drawn upon, the concepts of 'field', 'capitals' and 'habitus' being considered. Although Bourdieu's work is central to the analysis, other literature has

provided other helpful insights and it is to a brief discussion of these that I turn first. This discussion provides the reader with the underpinning body of knowledge that I have drawn on to analyse the resources available to the individual young people in this study and to consider how such resources may affect the FORs each young person has access to.

### **Class, resource and ways of being: fields, capitals and habitus**

Social class plays a central role in sociological explanations (Scase, 1992) yet defining 'social class' is highly problematic (Crompton et al, 2000). In the 'real world' social class may even be deemed to be irrelevant by some (Scase, 1992; Nash, 1999d), Crompton et al, (2000) and Adonis and Pollard, (1997) reminding us that for some it is assumed that we now have a 'classless' society. Scase (1992) lays out an argument that in capitalist society 'class' is a reality; for capitalism to be sustained there has to be owners of production and producers and thus there are two distinct classes: capitalists and workers. The complexity of modern production arrangements that distances the owners from the producers complicates this notion, but as Scase goes on to argue, it can be shown that people are positioned at different distances from the ownership of production and with these differences come variations in the amount of authority delegated by the owners of production to the 'worker'. Thus directors of large corporations, although not necessarily owning the means of production, have the authority to make strategic decisions on the running of the company, having as their goal the maximisation of profits for the owners. To execute their task they are given a great deal of control over the producers, but they are also in a position to make decisions that secure high salaries and other fringe benefits for themselves as well as ensuring the relative security of their jobs. As production has increasingly been organised into very large units so there has been a need to devolve the control of day-to-day practices to more junior managers. This group of people has the role of controlling the producers, but they are further removed from the ownership of production and have less authority to make strategic decisions. They are thus less powerful in determining their own conditions of employment in terms of economic or other reward. The producers are further removed from the power base. They are 'free' to offer their labour in return for a wage, but ultimately they are dependent on the decisions

of others for their livelihoods and their security. We can begin to see how people may be categorised dependent upon their position in relation to the ownership of the means of production in capitalist societies. But, as Scase (1992) points out, in everyday life people are more likely to describe themselves in terms of their occupation.

Goldthorpe (1987) has devised a class schema that takes into account both 'occupational function' and 'employment status'. That is it considers occupational categories that are broadly similar in terms of sources and levels of income and other rewards, job security, and the possibility of 'advancement' as well as grouping them by the position they hold in relation to the authority and control over the processes of production of which they are a part. Table 6.1 provides an overview of these categories.

A group that needs to be mentioned, that is absent from the schema above is those who are neither owners (or their representatives) nor producers, the unemployed. For some these are now referred to as the 'underclass' (Adonis and Pollard, 1997; Ainley, 1998).

However, Macdonald and Marsh (2000) argue that such an 'underclass' retain the culture and values of the 'working' class but are trapped in a system that is unable to provide them with the employment opportunities they seek. Nevertheless it may be argued that they are more distant from the ownership of production than the producers in so much as they are unable even to sell their labour in return for subsistence. This is a class, we shall see later, that none of the Class of 25 seek to belong to. It is a class to aspire to avoid.

Another group I will mention because it is relevant to the descriptions I give later of the family backgrounds of the Class of 25, is the position of carers. That is, those in the family who remain at home to look after the children. In terms of 'class' position they are difficult to allocate a place and it lies beyond the needs of this thesis to do so. The point to be made here is that while 'class' is a useful means of considering the positions people hold in relation to the ownership of economic capital, in terms of authority and control as well as, to an extent, economic remuneration and security, Bourdieu's concepts of 'field'

**Table 6.1: Goldthorpe's class schema**

Class No.	Description	Class
1	Self-employed and salaried higher-grade professionals, higher-grade administrators; managers in large industrial establishments; large proprietors	Service Class
2	Lower-grade professionals and higher-grade technicians; lower-grade administrators; managers of small businesses; supervisors of non-manual employees	
3	Routine nonmanual such as clerical and sales personnel	Intermediate class
4	Small proprietors and self-employed workers (except professionals)	
5	Lower-grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers	
6	Skilled manual wage earners	Working class
7	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	

and 'capitals' may provide tools that help in analysing a more complex set of social relationships than is possible with Goldthorpe's class schema alone.

Bourdieu, as we saw in Chapter 3, uses 'field' to map out where individuals (or institutions) are located in relation to each other in a social space, and the positions they hold in terms of the access they have to the resources, or capitals, at stake in a particular field. The resources Goldthorpe's schema brings to mind are those of finance<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>5</sup> Goldthorpe's schema takes into account only financial reward from occupation. However, Scase (1992) argues that in general those in the service class are in positions where they are better able to increase their personal wealth and accumulate their financial capital, an argument also taken up by Ingham (2000).

authority and control. Bourdieu introduces other capitals that may be at stake, capitals which may be used to increase financial resources, but which may also be gained through trading financial capital. Cultural capital - embodied, objectified and institutionalised, social capital and symbolic capital are also resources at stake.

Taking carers as an example we can see that the carer may have few economic resources of his/her own and a low position in terms of location in the field of economics but may possess a great deal of cultural capital which may take the form of educational qualifications, material cultural objects such as books and works of art, and knowing what counts as valued culture. Separate from cultural capital is social capital. Bourdieu appears to view social capital in terms of 'connections' but Coleman (1988) has constructed a fuller definition of social capital. According to Coleman (1988), although:

“... children are strongly affected by the human<sup>6</sup> capital possessed by their parents ... this human capital may be irrelevant to outcomes for children if parents are not an important part of their children's lives.” (pp. 88-89)

As Coleman points out, any capital accrual will have little effect if there are no effective means of transferring between generations. In this instance, social capital refers to the social relations within the family that allow the children access to the parent's other forms of capital in order to help them achieve their own capital accumulation. Coleman believes that both the physical presence of and the attention given by adults to the child will affect the amount of social capital available in the family. Where a parent remains at home to care for the children, it may be that there is an increase in the amount of social capital resulting in a greater level of transfer of the available cultural capital.

One further form of capital is mentioned by Bourdieu: symbolic capital. This includes reputation, prestige, recognition, honour and status and, as we have seen in Chapter 3, according to Bourdieu, is perhaps the most important capital of all, providing as it does legitimacy to create “the official version of the social world”, the power to represent

‘common sense’. This concept is highly problematic not least because what counts as ‘status’ or ‘common sense’ may vary greatly dependent upon the position from which such concepts are viewed. Willis (1977) and Nash (1999d) both provide examples of members of the working class who appear to hold in high esteem masculinity, physical toughness, that:

“... celebrates the worth of physical labour, and its associated modes of practice, in contrast to mental labour... that prides itself on being able to ‘see through’ the forms of control imposed by the school, and more widely, by agencies of the state.” (Nash, 1999d: p. 69)

This may be contrasted to others who seek recognition through achieving ‘success’ in education and aim to attain a ‘career’ in a profession<sup>7</sup>. This may be interpreted as a desire to accrue financial capital and this certainly may be one such aim, but also at stake is symbolic capital: a desire to gain a particular reputation, pride in the achievement, status from being educated.

When Brown (1987) writes of working class boys wanting to ‘get into’, ‘out of’ or ‘on in’ the working class it is not only the economic that appears to be at stake but a way of being, a way of viewing the world, in Bourdieu’s term: a habitus that incorporate ways of seeing the world economically, culturally and symbolically. Using social capital as defined by Coleman (1988) families are able to provide frameworks through which habitus or embodied cultural capital are able to grow.

### **Measuring the family capitals**

This is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the backgrounds of each individual student as this lies beyond the purpose of this research. Rather it is an attempt to provide some insight into the possible similarities and differences encountered by the individual

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<sup>6</sup> Coleman uses ‘human capital’ to refer to educational qualifications. It appears to be equivalent to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘institutionalised cultural capital’.

<sup>7</sup> Nash (1999d) provides examples of both children and parents seeking more than financial gain



children and how these may impact, or otherwise on individual thinking. The data available for this analysis is mother and father's occupations as given by the students (and in the case of the rural school, supplemented by information provided to the school on transfer from primary school); mother and father's educational attainments again as relayed by the student; the students purported understanding of the parents views on the importance of learning to the student; the students account of what they think their parents hopes are for the child's future; additional information gleaned in the course of the semi-structured interviews, including where possible, information relating to siblings and the possible capital this may make available.

*Financial and cultural capital: Occupations, qualifications and training*

The occupation provides broad clues as to the potential economic capital available in the family as well as the cultural capital that may influence other generations and be used to help offspring gain their own resources of capital. One must be cautious about the capitals assumed as the data are taken only from the students, some of whom appear to have, or at least speak as if they have, greater knowledge of parental occupation. Some provide, in addition, a partial view of the economic and cultural capital the parents may have gained in the past.

A more refined measure of financial capital could have been gained through questions regarding income and wealth addressed either to the children in the sample or, given the likelihood of their limited knowledge of this, to the parents direct. However, for the purposes of this research it was felt that this was an unnecessary intrusion into the family that would not sufficiently add to the findings to warrant its use. A refinement of the likely institutionalised cultural capital surrounding the student in the respective home can be made through the collection of data on parental qualifications and training.

As we have seen Coleman (1988) believes that such capital is unlikely to be relevant in affecting outcomes for children if there is no, or poor means of networking between parent and child. How important a part the parents play in the lives of the children will be

considered later but from the data on parental qualifications and training it is interesting to note the number of children that either claim not to know or are unsure about this aspect of their parents' lives. This is not to say that because the children are not consciously aware of their parents' educational history, such history does not infiltrate the home. Rather it may alert us to the possibility that, at least verbally, there may be gaps in the relationship between parent and child that Coleman claims is required if the capital of one generation is to be used to aid the acquisition of capital in the next.

We will turn to an evaluation of the social capital available, in due course, but before we leave the section on financial and human capital present within the family, the role of the wider family should be considered. The data for this is that which has been gained through the initial written exercise and subsequent two interview sessions with the students. Not all students have provided information but the aim is not to provide a comprehensive review of the family capital but rather to highlight that children may be exposed to capital resources in the home beyond that which a study of the parents alone would reveal.

For some (Isaac and Marie, rural and Sophie, private), siblings and step-siblings may provide a source of human capital transfer, having already gone on to university and therefore being able to provide first hand information about the experience as well as acting as potential role models. Others (Marie and Flo, rural and Felicity and Nigella, private) may be able to draw on the cultural capital of grandparents while Edmond and Wendy (both urban) speak of gaining artistic support from uncles.

Capital need not only be accrued through formal occupations and training, of course and it is clear from the data that some children are exposed to cultural capital in the home that is as a result of the life experiences of family members. For example Nigella's father has sailed across the Atlantic, her mother has travelled extensively and Nigella herself has experience of living in Cyprus and Germany as well as Britain. Olivia's mother has travelled around the world and has lived in Australia, while Olivia's father originates from Jamaica. Marie's mother has lived in Africa and America while Briony has travelled

throughout the Far East partly because of her father's employment and Jenni's father trained in Art in America. Briony's father and aunt are both good tennis players, her mother at art, while Nigella's father and other family members are particularly interested in history. Of course it should be remembered that other children in the sample may also have additional capital resources available to them that have not come to light during the brief meetings with the young people. A much more detailed study of the accumulation of family capital through informal learning (Wain, 1987) and its effect on intergenerational attitudes and aptitudes to learning may prove rich indeed but lies beyond the scope of this research. Suffice to say that, when considering the role that existing capital within the family may play in determining dispositions in children, it should not be assumed automatically that the capitals available are those only derived from occupations and qualifications. Nor should we assume necessarily that the effect comes only from the parents but may also be multigenerational.

But, as Coleman points out, any capital accrual will have little effect if there are no effective means of transferring between the generations. It is to the potential social capital existing within the family that we now turn. In this instance, social capital will refer to the social relations within the family that allow the children access to the parent's other forms of capital in order to help them achieve their own capital accumulation. It will not consider the nature of the social networks made available to the youngsters through the social networks of the parents although these are quite likely to have an affect on the young people.

### *Social capital*

To aid my analysis of the possible social capital within the family I have used Coleman's indicator of physical presence of parents/caregivers, his indicators of attention (that is, number of children in the family and expectations of the parents for the child going to college, adapted to a more general expectation for the future), a query on how important the child thinks her/his parent's think learning is for the child and any evidence gleaned through the interviews of the nature of communications that exist between the children and

their parents and siblings. A little more explanation of some of these categories is required.

### **Perceived Expectations of Parents**

The aim here is not to explore the parents responses to the question, 'What would you hope/like your daughter/son to do in the future?' but rather to analyse that which the children think would be their parents' response. What is of importance here is not the actual response but rather how the children interpret their parents' thinking. Of course, as ever, caution is required in analysing and interpreting the stories of the children who may have no idea what their parents' responses would be but provide an answer for the interviewer perhaps because they believe this is what is expected of them. They may have a range of responses in their minds but provide only a snapshot of these during the course of the interview or they may change consciously that which they believe is their parent's thinking to that which they report (Goffman, 1970). The point at issue here is not the sincerity or completeness of the response, but rather the variations in responses given by the children and what these may tell us about what the child wants us to believe is in 'mind'.

### **The Importance of Learning**

As with the perceived expectations of parents, what is of interest are the variations in responses given by the students rather than the 'accuracy' of the response.

### **Communications in the Family**

I explore the inferences that are made during the interviews about the nature of the communications that exist between the children and their parents and siblings. No direct questioning was made regarding this but some potential differences within and between families have arisen through the course of the interviews.

There is a range of student responses from Kelly who, although mentioning some aspects of communication with both her father and mother, points out her lack of interest as well as her lack of knowledge of her parents' histories, or thinking, to Nigella who talks avidly about her family and the talks they have, sometimes about history sometimes philosophical debates with her father. Rachel talks to her mother everyday about what she has done at school and was helped to learn from an early age, she believes, through her mother reading to her and testing her on her multiplication tables. Tracy gains help from her parents in English and Maths while Felicity spends time with her parents and is given help and support. For Jenni time with her mother is precious as she likes to be with her mother who is busy working much of the time, but also helps Jenni. Marie and Olivia's parents "egg on" their respective daughters to attempt learning. This includes payment for results. Wendy also spends time talking with her extended family, sometimes about the negative experiences of her father's schooling. Others, such as Vince, Edmond, Una and Isaac mention aspects of communications with their families but in a much more vague manner. This may be little more than a difference in the communication styles of the interviewees, of course, or may infer less family communication with regard to aspects of learning. Much more research would, however be required to understand better the differences in family communications.

Through re-presentations of each student in the Class of 25, pulling together each individual set of histories as spoken of through the course of the interviews, using these histories along with measured judgements of the positions of the students within the field of education, portraits are formed of the persons likely capital available. At the end of this section familial resources and pupil's prior achievement are provided in tabular form for ease of reference.

### *Students of Willow Way*

**Darren** is the second child of four children and lives with his mother and father. His mother is an unskilled industrial worker while his father is a manager in the food industry. Darren is not sure of the educational achievements of his parents but thinks they may have

attended college. He does not know what his parents' hopes are for his future, nor does he know how important they think learning is for him saying only that they never talk about such topics.

The general impression coming from across the four meetings I have had with Darren is that there is relatively little communication within the family. However, all communications with Darren through the course of the interviews have been perceived by me as stunted and difficult and it may be no more than an extension of this that draws me to conclude the limits of transfer of thoughts, ideas and knowledge between parents and child.

Darren has achieved a very low score on a cognitive ability test and his average Key Stage 2 results were below level 4.

**Diane** is the eldest child with three younger brothers. She lives at home with her mother and father, a home she sometimes does not want to return to because of the parental rows she faces. Diane's mother does not work while her father is a driver for a delivery company. She does not know what her parents' educational credentials are though she reveals that her mother was expelled from school for hitting a teacher. When asked what she thinks her parents would like her to do in the future she responds:

Diane: Get a really good job, work hard at school but my mum's having second thoughts about sending me to Willow Way

NA: Why's that?

Diane: I was bullied by someone in an older year and my mum wrote to the school and rang them but the school didn't believe me. They believed the older girl and the girl is still nasty to me. My mum thinks the people at school have attitude problems and some teachers are silly and stupid (. . .) She thinks I have an attitude problem because I swear and am mouthy and give back-chat and she thinks I'm copying other people from school. She thinks of getting me to move school

(...)

NA: And what do you think about this school?

Diane: Ash Down is better but I don't like the thought of making new friends. I don't think think this school's too bad

NA: Why is Ash Down better?

Diane: It's one of the best in Borborough and you have more chance of learning there but the only chance of getting in is if you play a musical instrument or your name is on the list or there's other children from your family there

NA: Why have you more chance of learning?

Diane: Cos there's more manners. The people have more manners and consideration for others

Diane believes her parents think learning is really important as:

"It affects your life when you're older and you need it to get a decent job."

I ask her how she knows this is what her parents think?

Diane: They tell me. Sometimes Dad takes the mick and calls me teacher's pet because I'm good at some things

NA: What does he mean by that?

Diane: He doesn't mean it. He means well.

The impression gained from the two meetings with Diane is although there is communication within the family some forms of communication are highly charged and tense. The parents apparently impress on Diane that education is important in order to gain employment and there seems to be an awareness of the apparent qualitative differences between schools. But another more subtle message may also be inculcated: that school - at least the one attended - is to be viewed with some derision and even her father's humour may have hidden depths of communicative power: that to be 'good' at school is to be ridiculed, albeit light-heartedly.

Diane's cognitive ability score was relatively low within the sample although she was in the mid-range for the school. Her average Key Stage 2 score was marginally below level 4.

**Edmond** is the younger of two children. He lives with his mother who is a clerical worker in local government and his father who works in a factory. Edmond is not sure about his parents' educational histories although he says that his father was in a few lower sets and that both parents may have gone to college although he doesn't know as his parents don't talk about it and he hasn't asked them. He believes they think learning to be important:

“ . . . because the school that they went to, some of the teachers weren't always there so they want me to get as good as education as possible . . . ”

When Edmond has had difficulty with aspects of school work they have paid for him to have private tuition.

There is clear encouragement to do better than the parents and although Edmond does not know, or does not wish to divulge his parents' educational history, or lack of it, he has been able to gain a disposition to try to achieve, whether academically or vocationally. That his parents are prepared to provide private tuition to aid his mobility no doubt gives him a tacit, if not overt, message that he should work hard at school.

Edmond occupies a similar position to Diane in terms of cognitive ability test results and Key Stage 2 levels.

**Kevin** lives with “my dad my sister my step-mum my step-sister and my step-brother” though teacher comments suggest that this may vary from time to time. His step-siblings are older than him, while his sister is younger. His step-mother is a shop assistant and his father is a carpenter. Although he does not know about their education he adds:



“But they help us with our learning (. . .) they read our homework and make sure it’s all done and makes sense to help us get better marks.”

His father does not want Kevin to be a carpenter:

Kevin: . . . he said that’s a dead end job and he wants me to get a good job

NA: Right . . . what does he mean do you think by dead end job?

Kevin: Well he said like it’s always out in the cold, it ruins your body, he’s on crutches at the moment cos he fell off a ladder and that so and he’s had operations on his legs where he’s always bending down and he don’t want me to end up like that like him

NA: Right so do you know, what do you think he [means] by ‘getting a good job’ then for you?

Kevin: Well like good job with good pay and . . . well where it’s inside or something

This desire for upward mobility is reflected also in Kevin’s response to how important he thinks his parents believe learning to be for Kevin:

“Quite important. They didn’t learn at school, well they did but it wasn’t as good. They want us to do better and get better jobs.”

Within the family there seems to be a message supportive of education and a desire for upward mobility of the offspring. However some communications appear to result in resentment on the part of Kevin, especially when he feels he is being compared to his sister and the sets at school she is placed in:

Kevin: . . . my sister she’s younger than me. She’s brainier and all that and sometimes like my dad used to say you should be up with the sets same as her and all that . . .

NA: And what do you think about that?

Kevin: Just can’t do it

(. . .)

NA: How does it make you feel when people compare you with your sister?

Kevin: Don't like it . . . cos I'm not like her am I really

Academically Kevin fits the same classification as Diane and Edmond when judged by test results.

**Matthew** is the eldest of two children and lives with his mother and father. His mother is a home care worker and his father, who used to play professional football for a local team now works in unskilled or semi-skilled employment in manufacturing industry. Matthew seems slightly vague about his parents educational histories and achievements but he thinks that his father gained a "grade one" in maths but did not do well in other subjects. Through his football training he went to college. Of his mother he says:

"She's not really that clever and she just likes working with old people cos (. . .)  
She didn't like get any good grades at school, anything like that."

He thinks she may receive training through her work but does not think this is so for his father.

Matthew thinks his parents would probably like him to go to college and university and to get a good job. He continues:

Matthew: They always like tell me to work hard at school . . . and get a, cos he said they didn't work that hard and they couldn't get that good a job so tell me to . . .

(. . .)

NA: So they don't think they've got jobs that good then?

Matthew: No. They said, cos my dad played football for Borborough (. . .) and he didn't really work that hard at school so when he finished his career he didn't really get that good a job

(. . .)

NA: What do you think he means by a good job?

Matthew: Well paid

Matthew believes his parents think it very important for him to learn in order to get a job.

Matthew has a clear idea of what his parents want for him. Again there is a desire to encourage upward mobility and recognition of the importance of education to achieve this.

Matthew's academic ability, both as measured by cognitive ability tests and Key Stage 2 test results is high, his average Key Stage 2 level being 5.

**Rachel** is the older of two children and lives with both her parents. Her mother works in a factory; her father is a welder, his welding training being all she is able to comment on when asked about her parents education and training. Her parents would like her to go to college but they "do not mind about university". They want her to obtain a "good job".

"They always think learning's important. Get a good education to get a good job."

Her mother has played an active part in helping Rachel to learn some of the skills privileged in formal learning so that Rachel claims, her mother made her practice her multiplication tables even before she started school; she used to read books to Rachel and Rachel used to have to read to her.

From the three meetings I have had with Rachel, the impression is that there are good communications between mother and daughter especially. Her mother has shown an interest in Rachel's education both through her actions of early years learning and through the conversations they appear to have daily about school. There is not, however, whether overt or tacit, an inculcation of the culture of higher education. Her parents 'don't mind' about university; expectation is not present.

Rachel might be described as an 'average' pupil, gaining results that place her at the mid-point in school and in the sample both in terms of cognitive ability tests and Key Stage 2 examinations.

**Tracy** is also the older of two children and lives with both parents. Her mother is a clerical worker in local government and her father works in customer services in the computer industry. Like Matthew she is vague about their education but thinks they "had some sort of O levels".

They both want her to go to university and they both want her to do well in education, being prepared to help her if she does not do well in some aspects. They think learning is very important and her mother always insists on homework being done before any other activity.

As with Rachel, communications within Tracy's family seem to be strong. Support for Tracy both in school work and in her education in dance, is evident. The choice made to move Tracy to a more 'successful' school (academically) may silently speak volumes about the transmission of values. The education of their daughter is important enough for the parents, along with others, not only to transfer Tracy to another school, but to seek out a school at considerable distance from home and to make the necessary transport arrangements for this to be practically possible.

Tracy is a member of the same 'set' as Matthew, scoring highly both in a cognitive ability test and at Key Stage 2.

**Una** is also the eldest of two children, living with her mother and stepfather. Her mother had worked as a receptionist and junior clerk but:

"... quit her job because well they were, everyone else was being made redundant and she was being treated like I don't know (. . .) she's trying to get [a job] now."

Una's stepfather is an engineer, having previously been in the army and her father works in a warehouse. She does not know anything about her parents' and stepfather's education although she thinks her mother may have done some computer training. Her parents tell her to do what she wants in the future but although she is not aware of any specific hopes they may have for her, they do believe education to be very important. When asked why she thinks they place importance on education she replies:

"I don't know, cos they keep saying get a better job than me [laughs] (. . .)  
You'll get a better job than me cos you won't be able then if you do, you won't  
be able to if you don't get a good job better job or good job whatever or good  
education you'll be getting the same job . . . like me cos mum's a receptionist but  
she don't like it, a filing clerk whatever so that's why"

Her parents response to education and her future seems similar to that of a 'classic' professional middle class response: that education is important, to do well, and to do whatever she wants in her future but does this mean the same to all children? For Una, the message is to work hard to gain a good education so as to attain a 'better' job than they have themselves.

Una's test results place her below average both within the sample and within the school.

Vince is the eldest of four children. He lives with his mother who is a child minder and his father who trains people in the use of computers. Vince thinks he has heard his father mention something about O levels, possibly that he gained some but gives no other information regarding his parents education and qualifications. He is vague about his parents' possible aspirations for him saying only that whatever he does it will be something that he is good at.

Vince: . . . My mum and dad think learning for me is pretty important . . .  
cos they're always willing me on to do stuff . . . like say like in a  
morning when I say I don't want to go to school they're the one that

says . . . you've got or something like that . . . they'll always help me, they always make sure I go

That Vince appears vague about familial correspondence regarding education tends to reflect a vagueness about Vince's conversations in general. There seems to be no overt pressure for Vince to adopt a particular stance, no 'pedagogic action' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) at work.

Vince has scored level 4 at Key Stage 2, in all three subjects. His cognitive ability score placed him in a high position within the school but at the mid-point across the sample.

**Wendy** is an only child, something she refers to on a number of occasions through the interview. She lives with both her parents, her mother working as a manager for a national retail company, her father works in a factory as a fork lift truck driver. Wendy's mother used to work as a "delivery lady" in the retail company's mail room but through promotion and with company training she took on a managerial role.

"She used to be on like really small wages but she just, like everybody was telling her, you'd never get out of the mailroom and just probably get fired in the end and she doesn't. She worked her way right up and she got to this where now which is a long way."

Wendy thinks her mother "did" O levels but her father's education was punctuated with truancy:

"I know that he used to skive school all the time [laughs] (. . .) he was a little rebel [laughs] that's what my mum says (. . .) he don't actually, don't admit it but all of my . . . dad's sisters they all used to say when we was talking about school they all used to say 'Our Norman how do you know anything about it, you never went' (. . .) he says you'd better do better than me cos otherwise you'll just end up working in that horrible old factory . . . if the factory's still around . . ."  
" (Wendy, Y8)

Yet he wants his daughter to achieve more than he has been able to do. She believes her parents want her to get a “good” job, by which she thinks they mean one in which she will be happy and that enables her to earn “quite a lot” of money so that she will be able to “bring up a family”.

Wendy’s mother purchases study books for Wendy to help her achieve at school and sometimes helps her with the work in these. They view education as very important for Wendy’s future.

There seems to be a relatively high degree of communication within Wendy’s family and it is clear from Wendy’s responses to my questions and comments made by teachers, that Wendy’s mother places importance on learning. Not all her communications are viewed positively by teaching staff. While one pastoral teacher describes Wendy’s mother as “really encouraging”, a subject teacher speaks of the mother reinforcing “Wendy’s negative side unfortunately”. The subject teacher goes on to say that Wendy’s mother never allows her daughter to be punished by detentions, and never regards her daughter’s “poor” behaviour as being Wendy’s “fault”.

Another message may inadvertently be passed on to Wendy: that it is in some way acceptable to truant or not to do well at school. As in Diane’s case this may be no more than light-hearted banter about her father’s dispositions but may convey a subtle message to Wendy about the acceptability of actions.

Wendy’s test results place her below average both within the sample and within the school.

### *Students of Oak Park*

**Barry** is the only child living with his grandmother who is an unskilled worker in the public sector. He does not know what educational history his grandmother has. When asked what he thinks his grandmother would like him to do in the future he says:

“Get a really good job and get like a family and set them up so I can support them and . . .”

He assumes she thinks learning to be “pretty important” as it is necessary to gain a job when he is older.

Barry’s grandmother appears to transmit the view that formal education is required to achieve the goal of gaining a ‘good’ job. She has told Barry he should go to college to learn about car maintenance, possibly realising the increasing need for academic credentials as well as practical knowhow. However some school records infer that communications with the extended family can be negative and unhelpful. We can only contemplate the effect such events may have on Barry’s own dispositions.

Barry achieved two differing results on his cognitive ability test, something the school is unable to explain. One result places him as low, the other as medium ability. At Key Stage 2 Barry achieved level 3 on average across the three subjects.

**Flo** is the older of two children. She lives with her mother but maintains contact with her father who owns a chain of retail outlets that have been in the family for several generations. Her mother has worked as a secretary in the past as well as riding horses. She now trains others in equestrian skills. Both her parents went to boarding school.

Although Flo initially says she does not know what her parents would like her to achieve in the future she later tells me that there are a “few things” her mother would like her to do and gives as an example to become a clothes designer, something she thinks her mother



believes Flo would be “good” at. Her parents think learning is important as they want her to be intelligent. They help her with her formal learning.

Communications mentioned tend to revolve around the mother rather than the father. Her mother seems to recognise Flo’s strengths in art and singing especially, and tries to encourage her daughter. Although Flo says her parents want her to be ‘intelligent’ her mother acts to protect her ‘shy’ daughter by acting as an intermediary with teachers, a relationship that seems to be welcomed by the staff.

Flo is positioned academically in the same low ‘set’ as Barry in terms of cognitive ability score and Key Stage 2 results.

**Isaac** is the fourth child though only two children currently live at home with the mother and father. His mother is a classroom assistant and his father is a project quality manager. Although he says his father had a good education his mother:

“... didn’t have a very good education cos she’s got lots of brothers and they used to live out in the countryside and my dad used to live in London so . . .”

Consequently his parents think learning to be very important for Isaac. Although he doesn’t really know what aspirations his parents may have for his future he thinks they would want him to gain a “decent job”. He has spoken to them about the possibility of training to be a doctor and this his mother likes as she believes there is a secure future in this field.

Within the family there seems to be general support for Isaac and evidence that he is aware of his parents’ views on education and future. However, it is not easy to gauge the amount or form of communication in the family from the data collected.

Isaac’s position academically is in the high achiever ‘set’, scoring well on the cognitive ability test and reaching level 5 in all three subjects by the end of Key Stage 2.

**Isla** is the second of four children and lives with her two younger siblings and her mother. She remains in contact with her father who, as we shall see in Chapter 11 has considerable influence on Isla's thinking. Isla's mother is a teacher and her father is the manager of the English division of a multi-national company. She infers she knows nothing of her parents' education but then says that she thinks that both her parents went to university, her mother certainly having done so. Her father wants her to go to university because he believes she has the ability to do so and wants her to "do my best" as does her mother. Her parents think learning is very important for her because:

"... if I didn't go to school I didn't learn I wouldn't know anything. Well I would but ... I wouldn't be able to support myself because I wouldn't be able to get a job or ..."

Within the family there seems to be communications between generations about hopes and aspirations, especially with the father. However there is also some evidence that sometimes communications between some family members break down or are difficult. Thus there have been issues arising from a breakdown in communications between parents with regard to Isla's older sister's education and career and this clearly impacted on Isla emotionally at least for a time. But there may also be a longer-term effect from the transmission of hidden messages as we shall see in Chapter 11.

Isla's test results place her in an 'average' position academically in that her Key Stage results at age 11 are level 4 and her cognitive ability test scores place her close to the middle of the range for the sample of students.

**Jenni** is the eldest of two children. At the time of the first interview she lives with her mother and father. Her mother is training to be a counsellor but has also trained children in jewellery making in the past. Jenni's father is an art teacher in private education having trained at a college in America. She is vague about her mother's education which seems to revolve mainly around vocational training.

Of her parents' hopes for her future she says:

"I don't think they've got like any dreams set for me, like they want me to do particular thing. I think they just want me to do what I want to do . . . and stick with it suppose . . ."

They think learning is quite important because:

". . . they want me to do well in life, they don't want me to do . . . do bad because they don't want me to slow down and get caught up in other things . . ."

Jenni says she spends a lot of time with her family and especially enjoys going running with her mother, or playing tennis with her because she spends so little time with her working mother.

Jenni holds the same position as Isla academically both in Key Stage results and cognitive ability test scores.

Katy is the older of two children and lives with her father though she maintains contact with her mother. Her mother does not work but trained in secretarial skills; her father is in management in the computer industry having been to university.

Katy believes her father would like her to have a similar lifestyle to himself: in management where she will be:

". . . involved with lots of people and continuously working . . ."

Her mother Katy believes, may also like her to do something similar but is likely to be more "flexible" as:

". . . she didn't really do a kind of job as such so she knows how hard it'll be."

Her parents think learning is “really important” and are concerned that Katy may be “slacking off”. Katy puts this concern down to the ‘fact’ that her parents know a teenage girl that has “had quite a troubled kind of learning situation”, rather than that Katy is actually putting in less effort.

Communications within the family seems to be high with Katy inferring that she has a particular interest in communications with others. She speaks with her brother and although there are times when she enjoys solitude, she also makes time to try to find ways to reach acceptable compromises with her father when tensions arise. Although her mother is absent from the family home, the family meet and go out socially together and both parents attend school meetings at least in public showing an act of solidarity for their child’s future.

Katy scored highly on the cognitive ability tests and also achieved level 5 across all three subjects at Key Stage 2.

**Keith** is the older of two children and lives with his mother and father. His mother works in education with special needs children, although she has been a self-employed graphic designer, a job his father remains in. Both his parents went to university and his mother has subsequently returned to college for further training.

He thinks his mother would like him to be a meteorologist or an architect - although Keith has confused this with archaeologist, stating that he would find working with bones boring. His father does not talk to him about careers. His mother thinks learning is very important, although again, he says his father does not mention such things. He believes his mother places importance on education because she wants him to “grow up very well educated.”

Although Keith seems to have some knowledge of his mothers’ views, his father does not overtly ‘educate’ Keith in the field of education or career. However, the overall effect is

one of highly effective communication, whether overt or tacit. A middle class family is in the process of turning out:

“ . . . a typical middle class child, delightful, energetic person that wants to learn and wants to achieve . . . probably not a typical boy I wouldn't think, in that respect, which is rather a pleasure someone who is doing different . . . ” (Ms Unwin, teacher)

Keith achieved the average Key Stage 2 result: level 4, this result being reflected in his 'average' achievement in a cognitive ability test.

Kelly is the younger of two children. She lives with her mother but maintains contact with her father. Communication seems to occur through the school rather than between parents. Her mother has a clerical job in the financial sector and her father works in the reception area in customer services at a garage. She says her father was clever and went to college but is unsure about whether he went to university. Her mother moved schools:

“ . . . because at one school when she was at school she didn't really learn stuff and she got held back a year but she didn't really need to get held back a year ( . . . ) and it wasn't a very good school so she went to a convent and she met loads of friends and then she went to college and I don't know what she did after that then got some jobs.”

Kelly's mother would like her to get a “decent” job whereas she thinks her father wants her to do what she would really enjoy doing and will probably help her get such a job. Her parents think learning is important for her career.

From the four meetings with Kelly there is an inference of very few communications taking place within the family and of some tension existing in the communications between parents at times. Kelly seems little interested in knowing about her mother's career and seems unable or unwilling to talk about parental hopes and aspirations for her.

Kelly's cognitive ability test result was one of the lowest in the sample, placing her in a low position within the school and in the sample. Her Key Stage 2 test results were at level 3.

Marie is the eldest of three children all of whom live with her mother and father. She also has two step-brothers who are adults and do not live with the family. Marie's mother runs her own business as a "specialist decorator". Her father deals in property and land development. As we have already seen there is other cultural capital likely to be available to her through her half-brothers and her grandparents. Marie is unaware of her parents' educational achievements but again as we have already seen, her father was educated at "the best boys school" and experienced world travel; her mother was educated at an all girls school and travelled extensively.

Marie tells me that her parents "don't care" what she does in the future so long as it is something she enjoys. However, because Marie has shown an interest in a career in acting her parents are paying for her to attend a stage school. This has resulted in the possibility of Marie trying to become known in the world of radio as suggested by a teacher at the stage school and encouraged by her mother.

Because of time constraints, Marie was not asked about the importance her mother and father place on education.

Marie likes to talk, she is highly articulate, her chatty disposition sometimes causing concern from her teachers and subsequently her parents. There is evidence that Marie's mother in particular, communicates in a positive, supportive and encouraging manner, cajoling Marie to persevere or to try new learning activities especially out of school. When Marie falls short of her parents' academic expectations both the school and the daughter are pushed into dialogue with the parents. Covert messages on the importance of learning abound both in terms of financial and time expenditure. Financially Marie is offered economic reward for

high attainment and the family is considering moving Marie to private education for A-levels.

Marie's cognitive ability test results and her Key Stage 2 results place her in a high position in the school and in the sample.

### *Students of Beech Hill*

**Briony** is the youngest of three children the two older siblings being her half-sisters who do not live in the family home. She lives with her mother and her father when he is at home, but his work means he spends much of his time abroad. Her father is a sales director, her mother an art dealer. She is unsure about her father's educational attainments but her mother has achieved a degree.

I ask her what she thinks her mother and father would like her to do in the future. She responds:

“Not really waste my life in doing kind of silly things (. . .) putting myself in danger maybe and (indistinct) if I made . . . by getting maybe a good job and enjoying . . . life really (whispers) that's all.”

Briony's notion of a good job is one that is enjoyable. Money comes into the reasoning but she concludes it is mainly about enjoyment. She cites as examples of good jobs doctor and lawyer.

I ask her how important she thinks her parents think learning is for her:

“Well I think they think it's quite important because they sent me to a good school so I could get a good education . . . for . . . for learning once I'd left school . . . “

There are few references to family communications in Briony's story although she does write in her introduction about the importance of family because:

“... they'll support you when you're sad and they make you laugh and be happy  
...”

Briony has gained 'average' results in her cognitive ability tests and level 4 in each of the three subjects tested at the end of Key Stage 2. Her cognitive ability test results place her in a low position at Beech Hill.

**Felicity** is the younger of two children and lives with her brother, mother and father. Both her parents trained as medical doctors. Her mother is a psychiatrist but her father has left the medical profession and now designs computer technology. Although her mother has continued her education through university, Felicity senses that her mother's early experiences were inferior in nature to those of Felicity's father both at school and at home. She infers that it is because of her mother's annoyance and possible jealousy at this lack of cultural capital that Felicity attends a private school, her parents prioritising education over all else, wanting her to experience a good education.

Of her parent's hopes for her future, Felicity says:

“Whatever I enjoy doing . . . something I get reasonable pay on and something, I don't think they'd particularly want me to become a murderer or anything but I think that if that's really what I had to be then they'd try to persuade um dissuade me or whatever, try to persuade me not to become say a murderer . . . but then they'd try and help me through these sort of things . . . not that I want to become a murderer or anything.”

Communications seem to be high in the family although the messages given by each parent seems to vary considerably, or at least Felicity's espoused interpretation of the messages. Her mother is described as easy to please, assuming everything her offspring do is “amazing”; conversely the father communicates that whatever is done could be



improved making it difficult for Felicity “to know whether he’s pleased or not.” The parents are supportive of her endeavours to write and she seems to share her efforts with them though she is reticent to talk of her work to a stranger, when interviewed. She speaks also of conversations with her aunt about emotional issues in her life and also of communications with her grandparents.

In all three subjects at the end of Key Stage 2, Felicity gained level 5. Her cognitive ability test results place her in a medium position within the school, although within the sample, the results are high.

**Nigella** is the second of four children and lives at home with her siblings and her mother and father, although her father is often away from home due to the nature of his work as a manager of a chain of restaurants. He was previously in the armed forces resulting in the family having gained experience of a number of geographic locations both in Britain and abroad. Nigella’s mother is currently looking for employment having given up her secretarial career to look after the children. She has trained as a nurse in the past but decided this was not a career she wanted to pursue. Both Nigella’s parents have tended to change direction from time to time. Her father had, she thinks, been “pressured into” taking law at university so as to follow in the footsteps of Nigella’s grandfather, a solicitor. Nigella implies that because he didn’t want to do this, her father had left university to join the army. Likewise her mother had gone to university then into nursing, before training as a secretary.

For her future Nigella thinks her parents want her to have a good job, family and friends, and a good life doing “something I enjoy”.

Although Nigella stresses that her family believe it is important for her to have hobbies, learning from and enjoying out-of-school activities she also believes they think learning at school is very important as they want all members of the family to “do well”. They encourage Nigella and her sisters to learn and she believes that if she is performing less

well in subjects that “you need to be able to get a good job”, she must work hard to get good grades.

Nigella portrays a picture of high communication taking place within her family, including “philosophical debates” with her father. She transmits a sense of assurance in what her parents’ beliefs, values and expectations are without in any way suggesting ‘overt’ inculcation occurring.

Nigella’s cognitive ability test results place her at the mid-point of the sample but in a more lowly position at Beech Hill. Her Key Stage 2 test results averaged at marginally above level 4.

**Olivia** is the younger of two children and lives with her sibling, mother and father. Her mother is a “nurse teacher” and her father works as an artist for a company specialising in children’s magazines. Both her parents went to art college. She is unsure if her father also went to university. After art college her mother trained as a nurse.

When asked about her parents’ aspirations for her future she says that she doesn’t think they are “really that bothered” but they do want her to be “successful”. Her mother does not want her to solely become a housewife but would like Olivia to experience world travel as she herself had done. Her parents think learning to be very important as they want her to do well and:

“If I didn’t I wouldn’t be able to get like a good job in business or something.”

She goes on to explain that high pay is one criteria by which to judge the quality of a job, but that enjoyment is another, her mother being especially influential here, pointing out that although nursing is not that well paid, she has always enjoyed her work.

Although Olivia says she doesn’t think her parents are “really bothered” about her future there is certainly some evidence of her parents communicating the importance of formal

education. This is backed up by financial inducement being available to Olivia for her productivity in the field of education. But formal education is not all that Olivia is being encouraged to try: her mother at least, seems keen that Olivia be able to experience other learning opportunities as she herself had done, through travel.

Olivia has one of the highest scores in the cognitive ability tests placing her in a high position within both the school and the sample. She did not take Key Stage tests at the end of Year 6.

**Sophie** is also the younger of two children and lives with both parents. Her father is a self-employed businessman which involves design, though Sophie is not sure of the exact nature of the work. Her mother is a nurse who is planning to run her own business also. Sophie's father went to university; her mother trained as a nurse.

Sophie believes her parents probably want her to have a "secure job" and be happy "with what I've got".

To ensure this future for her she thinks they believe learning to be very important:

" . . . because like you need a good education . . . to be able to get on with life and . . . I don't know, they just want you to be able to enjoy what you've got when you're older so they give you the best possibilities ( . . . ) So they're giving you a good education to make sure . . . you have all the options that you could so that you're able to choose from everything that you enjoy the most."

Sophie, like Felicity and William, picks up the message of the importance of education at least in part through her parents' decision to purchase a 'good' education for their daughter and open up possibilities for her future.

Sophie has achieved one of the highest scores in the sample on a cognitive ability test. Her Key Stage 2 test results were all at level 5.

**William** is the older of two children. He lives with his mother, father and younger sister. His mother works in the Civil Service and has progressed from a secretarial role to a management position. His father also works in the Civil Service though William infers that his job is more lowly than that of his mother. Having left school at sixteen and with a “GCSE in maths” his father had joined the Armed Forces as an engineer, taking time out to take care of the children before gaining administrative employment in the public sector.

William thinks his parents want him to gain a good education, be able to “get a decent job” and have options so he is able to decide what he wants to do.

“I think they’ll be happy whatever I do really as long as I did something that you know . . . I mean I don’t think they’d be very happy if, you know, after I left school I became ( . . . ) you know a dustman or something like that ( . . . ) I think they’d like me to do something which is like a challenge to me or . . . something which you know isn’t . . . something anybody could do . . . “

On his view of his parent’s thoughts about the importance of learning he says

“Pretty important, I wouldn’t be here otherwise.”

Like others from the private school, whatever verbal communication within the family, tacit messages are given on the importance of schooling through the very fact of their attendance at a fee paying school. It is not that there is a clear pathway carved out for William but there is a positional niche. Like others from the school, education is not only about gaining a position, but about providing the opportunity of choice, a freedom apparently denied, or at least curtailed, in lesser places.

William scored very highly in a cognitive ability test. His Key Stage 2 results were a mix of level 4 and level 5.

**Table 6.2: Summary of resources of parents**

NAME	EDUCATION WHERE KNOWN ? denotes apparent lack of certainty		CLASS using adaptation of Goldthorpe's class schema	
	MOTHER	FATHER	MOTHER	FATHER
<i>Willow Way School: urban</i>				
Darren	FE?	FE?	Working	Service
Diane			Unemployed	Working
Edmond	FE?	FE?	Intermediate	Working
Kevin			Intermediate	Working
Matthew		O-level?	Intermediate	Working
Rachel			Working	Working
Tracy	O-levels?	O-levels?	Intermediate	Intermediate
Una			Unemployed	Working
Vince		O-levels?	Intermediate	Service
Wendy	O-levels?		Service	Working
<i>Oak Park School: Rural</i>				
Barry			Working	
Flo	Private	Private	Intermediate	Service
Isaac			Intermediate	Service
Isla	HE	HE?	Service	Service
Jenni		HE?	Student	Service
Katy		HE	Unemployed	Service
Keith	HE	HE	Intermediate	Intermediate
Kelly		FE/HE?	Intermediate	Intermediate
Marie	Private	Private	Intermediate	Service
<i>Beech Hill: Private</i>				
Briony	HE		Intermediate	Service
Felicity	HE	HE	Service	Service
Nigella	HE	HE	Carer	Service
Olivia	FE	FE/HE?	Service	Service
Sophie		HE	Service	Intermediate
William		O-level	Service	Intermediate

**Table 6.3: Students' prior achievement**

NAME	COGNITIVE ABILITY SCORE*	KEY STAGE 2 RESULTS**		
		ENGLISH	MATHEMATICS	SCIENCE
Willow Way School: urban				
Wendy	70-79	Below	Below	Below
Darren	70-79	Below	Below	Below
Diane	80-89	Expected	Below	Below
Kevin	80-89	Expected	Below	Below
Edmond	90-99	Expected	Expected	Expected
Una	90-99	Below	Expected	Below
Rachel	100-109	Expected	Expected	Expected
Vince	100-109	Expected	Expected	Expected
Matthew	110-119	Above	Above	Expected
Tracy	110-119	Above	Above	Above
Oak Park School: rural				
Kelly	70-79	Below	Below	Below
Flo	70-79	Below	Below	Below
Barry	80-89/100-109	Below	Below	Below
Isla	100-109	Expected	Expected	Expected
Keith	100-109	Expected	Expected	Expected
Jenni	100-109	Expected	Expected	Expected
Marie	110-119	Above	Above	Above
Katy	110-119	Above	Above	Above
Isaac	110-119	Above	Above	Above
Beech Hill School: private				
Briony	90-99	Expected		Expected
Nigella	100-109	Above	Expected	Expected
Felicity	110-119	Above	Above	Above
Olivia	120-129			
Sophie	120-129	Above	Above	Above
William	130-139	Above	Above	Above

\* A range has been given rather than actual test results to protect the identities of students. Because different tests have been used at Beech Hill to those used at Willow Way and Oak Park, these scores are not directly comparable.

\*\* These levels have been constructed from teacher assessments where available and pupils' reported 'actual' results. 'Expected' level at Key Stage 2 is Level 4.

### *The Importance of Family to the Student*

The final element to explore in terms of social capital within the family is the importance the interviewees place on the family within their lives.

The students were asked 'What would you say was important to you in your life?'

Twenty-three responses were obtained Marie not having been asked due to time constraints. Of the twenty-three, nineteen students believe their family to be important with only Vince, Darren, Tracy and William not mentioning family in their responses. For Vince it was his future that was important; a medical condition was of prime importance to Darren; Tracy spoke of education, happiness and health as being important; and William listed his life, being here, and being able to do what he wants, that is his freedom.

It is easy to read too much into responses made in a short space of time which provide only a snapshot of the thinking of the respondent. Nevertheless, taken alongside other data relating to the potential family social capital, this may provide an additional perspective.

### *Observations on Family Capital*

#### **Occupations**

A range of parental occupations exist amongst the pupils of each of the three schools, but a certain degree of clustering also appears to emerge in ways that might be expected. In the urban school there is a skew to industrial and service sector unskilled and skilled jobs, those broadly referred to as working class positions (Goldthorpe, 1987). In the rural school and private school a greater proportion of the parents fit into intermediate and higher status jobs, in the service and administrative sectors as well as in management. On the Goldthorpe (1987) classification these are the intermediate and service classes.

Although occupation alone cannot be certain evidence of the existence of forms of capital or its transmission to younger generations, nevertheless parents' occupational experiences are different and the type of 'knowledge' they are able to offer their off-spring whether overtly or tacitly, will also vary.

There are other subtle differences, too, not visible from the portraits above, but present in the 'voices' of the children. For instance, as we shall see in Chapter 10, working class boys seem to see sport as a means to upward mobility. In this data we see Matthew's (lower socio-economic status (SES)) father having been a professional sportsman while Flo's (higher SES) mother has, in the past been employed as a sportswoman. The former had been a professional footballer with a lowly league club, the latter a horse rider. As Bourdieu (1993) points out, football may be seen as a means of upward mobility amongst the dominated classes, while it seems likely that horse riding would more closely resemble Bourdieu's examples of tennis and golf as a sport becoming of the middle class. If one considers too, the financial capital required in order to enter the equestrian arena one sees a sport beyond the objective possibilities of many.

In all three schools, some parents belong to the administrative/managerial category. A closer examination of the hierarchies within this reveals potential differences of the likely financial and human capital each role requires and attains. Thus, in the urban school two of the fathers are employed in customer services in the computer industry and it may be argued fit more closely in the industrial skilled or administrative/clerical categories, the third is a manager at an egg packing plant for a regional company while the managerial mother works as a planning manager for a national retailer. Taking the parents in the same category at the rural school, one is a communications and PR manager for a computer company, one a project quality manager and the other the manager of the UK division of a German furnishing company. The three parents of children at the private school who may be categorised as administrative/managerial are an international sales director working mainly abroad, a manager of a franchised chain of restaurants working across Britain and a Civil Servant. Although from these descriptions positions within the set of administrative/managerial can only be estimated, there appears to be the possibility at least of hierarchical differences in income, human capital and prestige.

One further occupational set will be magnified to show the potential internal hierarchies in the service sector. In the urban school the mothers have the occupations of child minder,



care assistant of the elderly and shop assistant. In the rural school we have a classroom assistant, a care assistant who is training to be a counsellor and has taught in arts and crafts in the past, a teacher of riding and three teachers at least one of which teaches in the private sector. Finally, those parents whose children attend the private school, in this sample, and have or have had occupations in the service sector (excluding the armed forces) are or have been within the medical field, three as nurses and two as doctors. Of the three nurses one trained at Bart's Hospital in London and one at the Royal London Hospital with hints of elite nursing training. Again one sees the shift from low paid, low skilled service work to prestigious roles in the service sector as one moves from urban to rural and on to private schooling. There are implications here in terms of financial, cultural, symbolic and social capital and the differing levels of social capital thus available to the various students through their families.

### **Institutionalised Cultural Capital: Qualifications and Training**

We saw earlier that some of the children appear to have gaps in their knowledge of parental experiences and achievements in formal learning. It is noteworthy that the skew of ignorance is to the lower socio-economic classes while children from the higher classes tend toward an apparent greater knowledge of their parents' educational biographies. Is it that the lower SES children have less knowledge or, given the present importance placed in society on education, do they feel stigmatised by their parents' apparent lack of success?

Lower SES children appear to gain encouragement to work at school but do not gain specific knowledge about education, especially as they move through the system toward further and higher education. This is not surprising given that the higher the social class the greater the likelihood that parents have experience of higher education. Conversely, the lower the social class the greater the incidence of education appearing to cease beyond the compulsory. Without experience, how much parents are able to help their children in learning about formal learning is likely to be restricted. As Ball et al (1999) point out, for parents with no experience of further and higher education it may be difficult to intervene purposefully in their children's decision-making. As Lauder and Hughes (1999) comment, students may have quite different frames of reference through which they make sense of

what 'education' means; middle class pupils may well benefit from the "wisdom of the class".

This does not mean that the desire to succeed and to continue in formal education is confined to the higher SES groups. Rather it alerts us to the possibility that the resources available to lower SES pupils may act as constraints on the frames of reference they are able to draw on to help them 'make sense' of education, learning and what it means to 'succeed'. This notion is developed in Chapter 11 when I present case studies of three girls measured as 'average' on cognitive ability and Key Stage 2 tests.

### **Perceived Expectations of the Parents**

Across the school groups comes the message that children assume their parents hope they will gain good jobs; for some this involves also being happy, for others it appears only to be in terms of financial wealth. Of course what the 'good job' means to each young person and/or their parents may vary considerably. Nash (1999a) points out that a working class parent may be content with a move to a technical job for her/his offspring whereas the middle classes will only be pleased if their children acquire professional status.

When we break into groups those who think in terms of financial gain and the acquisition of skills or qualifications required to amass financial capital; those who may seek financial gain but also hope for status and prestige; and those who mention intrinsic reward which may be seen as 'emotional' capital, social class once more reappears. Although the emotional 'capitalists', that is those mentioning intrinsic reward, are not exclusively from the middle classes, they are predominantly so. Likewise there is a gender bias, the boys being more likely to speak of finance and credentials, the girls of enjoyment.

### **Perceived Parental Views on the Importance of Learning**

Not surprisingly most young people thought that their parents regarded learning, or more precisely formal learning, as important. In general this was because it is regarded as a means of gaining work, in some cases 'good' work, and, especially for the lower socio-

economic groups 'better' work than their parents had experienced. Middle class young people were more likely to speak in terms of maintenance of position than upward mobility. Middle class children were also more likely to mention learning in terms of freedom of choice, keeping open options for futures rather than foreclosing them.

### **Communications in the Family**

One of the most striking patterns to emerge from this is the apparent gender split in communications. There is also the possibility of ability differentiation, those occupying a lower space in the field of communications with parents also mainly, but not exclusively, inhabiting lower positions in the space of academically judged abilities.

But it is not just about the amount of communication, or opportunity for such that needs to be considered. The language used, the messages sent and received may all also play their part in the formation of habitus. For Diane having her father 'take the mick' because she is doing well may seem a 'natural' part of life. Do middle class children have the same experience with their families? Hearing stories of a father 'skiving off' school may form a part of Wendy's cultural exchanges; how does this differ to those who hear that their parents have stayed with education long after the end of compulsory education? Kevin tells of his dislike at his father's comparisons of Kevin and his 'cleverer' sister; Felicity says her parents would not make such comparison between her and her brother as they know it would hurt her, yet still she speaks of her jealousy of her brother's greater 'ability'. How might these differing communications culminate in the formation and transformation of habitus? And how might the intonation, the frequency, the context in which the words are spoken also affect the inculcation of capital and habitus from one generation to the next? These queries go beyond the scope of this research yet they should not be forgotten or overlooked.

### **Capital resources available from out-of-school activities**

Young people are not only able to benefit from resources at their disposal within the family but also from interaction with 'competent' members of their social group (Jenkins,

1992). This may include their peers but can also arise from the contacts they make through the use they make of their 'leisure' time, that is time spent out of school on activities not related to school work. In this final section on capital resources we explore the variations in the experiences of the young people gained from their 'free' time.

Several categories of activities that the children participate in appear to emerge from the data: social, sporting, intellectual, performing, artistic/creative, travel and spiritual. Students belong to one or more categories.

### *Social*

Only five students (Una, urban; Marie and Isla, rural; and Olivia and Felicity, private) did not list social activities. Of the other nineteen responses seventeen mentioned spending time with friends while Jenni additionally spoke of helping with the scouts and Katy, who did not mention friends, does help with community projects in the village in which she lives. Some embellished their responses by providing information about the types of activities they may be involved in with their friends. For instance some went biking or played football, some visited cinemas or nightclubs, others played on computers, while others went shopping or on holiday with their friends. This raises an issue about the cultural and social capital that may be gained from the various social activities taking place and may be fertile ground for further research.

### *Sporting*

All but one student (Una, urban) named at least one kinaesthetic activity with which they used some of their non-school time. Some sport was carried out informally, for other young people sporting activities included formally organised clubs. Boys from the urban school were members of football clubs; Keith, a middle class student played cricket for a local team; formal tennis lessons were taken by Marie and Jenni, both middle class girls; and Katy (middle class) and Rachel (working class) belong to swimming clubs. A similar class based pattern emerges when looking at the informal sports the children participate in.

Football, walking, swimming and biking are all sports mentioned by a range of youngsters across both class and gender divides. Tennis, riding and sailing are the pastimes of the socially more elite.

### *Intellectual*

Four interviewees specified some form of 'intellectual' activities: Tracy (urban) who solves maths problems for fun; Katy (rural) who visits places such as museums with her family; William (private) who uses his computer to create web pages and Nigella (private) who spends time having 'philosophical' debates with her father.

### *Performing Arts and Creative Practice*

A number of the young people are learning to play musical instruments: Edmond (urban) and Briony (private) the piano; Marie (rural) and Olivia (private) the flute. Olivia is also a member of a Choral Society run by the school. Additionally Olivia and Felicity (private) had tried learning the piano in the past, the latter also having tried the harp, but have since stopped taking lessons. Tracy (urban) is a member of a dance school while Marie (rural) attends a drama school incorporating dancing, singing and acting. In the past Olivia has attended a ballet school and Felicity an acting school but again, both have now given these activities up.

Una and Wendy (urban), Flo (rural) and Olivia, Briony and Felicity (private) all enjoy spending time drawing, designing and in the cases of Olivia and Briony, making. Briony and Felicity (private) both spoke of writing in their spare time, the latter being involved in writing and illustrating a book.

### *Travel*

Five members of the sample (Barry, rural and William, Olivia, Briony and Nigella, all private) mentioned travel and holidays as out of school interests with Olivia, Briony and Nigella showing particular interest in this area.

In addition to these categories time out of school was spent watching television, listening to music, playing on a computer and, for Flo (rural) and Briony and Nigella (private), reading. Wendy (urban) has an interest in learning about the mind, body and spirit, an area of interest of some of her family members.

### *Observations on Out-of-School Capital Resources*

It is worth noting the heavier concentration of intellectual, performing, artistic, creative and travel related activities participated in by those attending private school. This may be a reflection of the financial capital available within the families, but it may also be a reflection of a desire to increase the children's cultural capital, which may play an important role in social reproduction as Bourdieu suggests. This point becomes the more noticeable when one also considers the differences in the sports pursued by the various social groups of children. Thus we find that those sports provided as examples of 'working class' activities by Bourdieu, - football, snooker and biking - mainly being pursued by the children with lower socio-economic status, while those higher in the social hierarchy tend to pursue the sports of the elite – tennis, riding and sailing.

Even in the activities of watching television and listening to music, although the numbers of responses given are far too small to make any claim to generalisations, it is interesting to note that those mentioning watching 'soaps' came from across the socio-economic groups while those watching news, documentaries and satirical programmes came from the 'elites'; those listening to 'pop' music came from the urban school while those who liked to listen to musicals, jazz and classical music came from the private school.

## **Chapter 7: Learning Through Pupils' Eyes and the Vocationalising of Education**

In this chapter I explore the frames of reference pupils hold in respect of the concept of learning. Three questions are posed:

- What do students think it means 'to learn'?
- What do students think is the rationale for learning?
- How important is learning to the students?

### **Section 1: What it means to learn**

Saljo's (1979, cited in Hartley, 1998) framework of concepts of learning, introduced in Chapter 2, provides a useful heuristic in analysing how students talk about what 'learning' means to them. To reiterate, the five concepts of learning may be summarised as:

1. Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge which involves acquiring 'information' or 'knowing a lot';
2. Learning as memorising, that is storing information that is later reproduced;
3. Learning as acquiring facts, skills and methods, thus remembering knowledge and procedures that are going to be useful at a later date;
4. Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning. Here learning is seen as a process, where learning is a constructive activity;
5. Learning as a process that helps us to interpret and understand reality, involving comprehending the world by reinterpreting information and knowledge in the light of one's own experience and value.

A sixth concept of learning may be added to this: learning as transferring understanding or experiences from one situation to another such as from informal learning out of school to formal learning.

What, for the adolescent is 'learning'? And does it mean something different in and out of school; that is through formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities (Tight, 1998; Wain, 1987)? It was these questions that led me to try to unpack what was in the minds of young learners in terms of learning but how to do so was not clear. A discussion of the way in which I ultimately chose to approach this is given in Chapter 3. In short, I asked students to tell me about the way in which they spend their time out-of-school and after exploring their reasons for doing so, I asked them to consider whether they thought they learned anything from the various activities, using a prompt card when I felt this might be helpful. For in-school activities the prompt card was used again. The prompt card gave three statements: 'learn a lot', 'learn something' and 'learn nothing'. Pupils were asked to give examples of subjects or activities in school that they thought each statement to be true for. Follow-up questioning occurred both for in and out of school activities to try to discover what each pupil's concepts of learning might be. The questioning took place early in the first interviews, held in the spring term of Year 8 when the pupils were 12 - 13 years of age. In the following I draw on Saljo's concepts of learning as a heuristic in analysing the data, but as we shall see it requires further interpretation.

### *Pupil's Eye View of Learning*

Reading the responses to my questioning on the occurrence of learning both in and out of school three broad groups emerge: those who do not know or are unable or unwilling to communicate their thinking; those who regard learning as mainly the memorisation or 'acquisition' of skills and/or knowledge as in Saljo's concepts 1 - 3; and those who move beyond Concept 3 to either talk or enact meaning-making. Both the 'skills' group' and the 'meaning-makers' group require further analysis to understand better the differences that appear to exist within their thinking. Prior to this it is worth noting that on viewing the students present in these three categories through the eyes of a sociologist, those that speak of learning as more than the acquisition of 'skills' are mainly girls, that is eight of the nine members of the group are female.



In terms of socio-economic classification, noting the difficulty of easily identifying precise membership, eight of the nine pupils may be deemed to be of middle class origin, while the ninth member attends the lowest status school and has parents whose occupations and educational histories infer membership of the working classes, although as Nash (1999d) might say they also appear to be 'upwardly striving' or aspirant middle class.

Intellectually, as defined by cognitive ability test scores and national levels achieved at Key Stage 2, the 'meaning-makers' are all of high or 'high average' ability. These pupils speak in ways that infers that they are consciously trying to make sense of their worlds, trying to theorise about learning rather than repeating only that which they have been given to learn. The 'skills' group is a more mixed set of individuals although the social skew is clearly to the working class. Of the fourteen members (eight of whom are male and six female), four may be described as middle class, while ten might broadly be described as having working class roots, previous reservations about precise classification, remaining. Intellectually, two of the fourteen fall into the category of high 'intelligence', seven might be regarded as having average 'intelligence', while five students are of low average or low intellectual grade as quantified by school measures, that is cognitive ability test scores and Key Stage test results. The two students that do not provide sufficient data to be classified are both female, one of middle class origin, the other working class. Both have been measured as of lower than average or expected 'standard', that is the 'standard' set by policy-makers.

Quantifiably, on initial interrogation the lines are drawn for an easy conclusion that social class, gender and intellect are significant factors in determining one's perception of the concept of learning. Only on closer examination of the data does a different story emerge. Through a detailed analysis of a number of cases the complexity of the children's thinking about and enactment of learning will be revealed.

### **Felicity's Story of Learning**

One of the difficulties of taking an existing set of conceptual descriptions for learning, such as those of Saljo's is that the terms used by the author may be used by others quite differently. Felicity's account of language learning shows the interweaving of the

conceptual descriptions of learning given above. Felicity has been talking about why she prefers learning Latin to French:

- Felicity: Last year in Latin I really hated Latin . . . because we had this book which was, it was quite fun . . . and there were like stories and things but I didn't really feel we were learning anything . . . and I couldn't understand it and they wouldn't, they didn't tell us any tables<sup>8</sup> and things but I haven't really, and I only really began to understand it at the beginning of this year when they started to give us . . . tables and that, and that sort of thing ( . . . ) to learn and then I could make sense of what we were learning . . .
- NA: So when you've learned the tables what do you do with what you've learned?
- Felicity: . . . Use it to understand and to do the work in, in, I don't know, what was the question?
- NA: When you've learned your tables how do you use that to help, what do you do with that information?
- Felicity: . . . Um I don't really understand
- NA: Well you've got a table and you learn it and ( . . . ) then what happens?
- Felicity: You remember it and then you use it . . . when you need it
- NA: Right and what sorts of things would you be likely to use it for?
- Felicity: Translations and . . . and um . . . vocabulary sometimes

Making sense (Concept 4 of Saljo's list) of learning in the context of languages, is for Felicity to have been given lists (Concept 1) to memorise (Concept 2) that she may either reproduce or use at a later date (Concepts 2 and 3) and apply the learning to 'novel' contexts (Concept 6).

Felicity has a number of activities to fill her 'leisure time'. When asked to reflect on whether she learns anything from these activities she differentiates by activity. For ease of reference her responses are shown in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1 Felicity's view of learning out-of-school**

Activity	Script regarding amount learned	Concept(s)/ Comments
Writing a novel	"I think I learn quite a lot because I learn new words and I learn sort of how to write which I want to learn ( . . . ) for when I'm older if I want to become an author and things like that and I learn sort of grammatical things when my mum and dad read it over and what people think of it . . ."	1, 3
Watching TV	" . . . with the documentaries and things I learn probably quite a lot but with some other things like programmes which are meant to be funny I don't really learn anything . . ."	1
Playing football and netball	"Nothing . . . well unless it's like how to play the sport because ( . . . ) unless it, I don't know what you, do you mean work learning by just anything or . . ."	What counts as 'learning'
Drawing	"I learn something . . . because I've got to look at it sort of closely and ( . . . ) you sort of learn something you didn't know about it before and you think oh yeah I didn't know that was there . . ."	1
Cooking	" . . . Something ( . . . ) about how to use weights and I have to do sometimes I have to do mathematics to work it out when I've got like haven't got four grams or something . . ."	3, 6
Walking	" . . . sometimes nothing but then sometimes my grandpa sort of points out and says what's that and . . . tells me what it is if I don't know . . ."	1
Playing	" . . . with games like Scrabble and things I learn words and things like that . . . frightening my brother . . . I learn . . . nothing . . . unless I don't know . . . but I learn that like what I shouldn't do to my brother and what I should do . . . like I know he gets really stressy if I lock him out but then I just whack him ( . . . ) but I don't really know if that's learning or not . . ." When asked to explain what she means by whether it is learning she responds: "Well it's sort of learning. You could say I learn that not to . . . not to hit my brother whatever but then it wouldn't really be much use in any other context sort of."	1 Learning moral rules; What counts as 'learning'  3

What is interesting about Felicity's response is that while she talks mainly about the concept of learning in terms of Saljo's conceptions 1 - 3, she acts out concept 4, verbalising in some way her meaning-making, trying to make sense of the concept of

<sup>8</sup> The exact nature of 'tables' was not elicited from Felicity but is assumed to be grammatical tables.

learning for herself. She is not alone in this, Briony, Nigella, Olivia, and William in particular do so too. Sociologically the reader may wish to note that all these learners attend the high status school and as such may be regarded as 'middle class' although William's family history, as we shall see later makes this classification slightly more problematic. In terms of prior achievement they are 'average' or above.

Additional questioning allows Felicity to reflect further on her notion of learning. I ask her to explain how the activities in which she thinks she learns a lot differ from those where she learns little or nothing:

- Felicity: You're interested in them for a start . . . and you can be bothered to learn and . . . there's lots of information coming and sort of slowly enough for you to remember but not too slow for you to get really bored and give in . . .
- NA: And what about the one's where you're learning nothing?
- Felicity: I'm just basically having fun and there isn't really much to learn really . . . other than how to do the game or how to work with other people but (. . .) nobody's telling you anything so there's really nothing to learn or you can't really notice anything to learn yourself
- NA: But in drawing you say you learn (. . .) something. Is someone telling you?
- Felicity: No (. . .) I'm telling myself some'at I mean . . . learning for myself (. . .) when I said learning myself I mean teaching myself (. . .)
- NA: So how are you teaching or learning yourself?
- Felicity: Finding it out for myself
- NA: Right so how do you go about finding it out for yourself?
- Felicity: . . . You sort of notice it and then you sort of think it out whether that would be right or not, if there's any problems with that and then you might test it and then that's it really, take it that you've learned it

In this passage, Felicity introduces some new thoughts regarding learning. Firstly she infers the need for intrinsic reward in order to be sufficiently motivated to learn. Motivation will be discussed in the next chapter. Secondly she reaffirms her concept of

learning as being about the gathering of knowledge, whether this is through one's own efforts or transmitted from another. Thirdly she moves beyond the acquisition of facts and skills and describes a method of learning which touches on meaning-making: thinking out for oneself then testing, trying out an idea to see if her understanding works.

### Matthew's Story of Learning

Felicity's text is quite different to that gathered from Matthew whose measures of prior achievement are similar to those of Felicity. Socio-economically his grouping is, however quite different. He attends the lowest status school in the sample and when graded by parental occupation and educational experience he fits most closely to the working class. His out-of-school activities revolve particularly around sport and he is prompted to reflect on the amount of learning he thinks takes place through these activities. Although he initially says he doesn't really think he learns anything he goes on to explore the possibilities. As for Felicity, the resulting text has been tabulated and is given in Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2 Matthew's view of learning out-of-school**

Activity	Script regarding amount learned	Concept(s)/ comments
Basketball	"Learn how to play basketball better . . . cos I used to be rubbish . . . they taught me how to play a bit better . . ."	1-2
Football	"Play football a bit better . . ."	1-2
Computer games	"Learn to use a computer"	1-2
Watching professional football	"If there's a good player can learn like how they play and try and make something ( . . ) like watch the player see how they play ( . . ) I try and do it in the real game"	3
Socialising	"Not to steal . . ."	Moral rules

Here Matthew describes like Felicity a range of activities where learning is about gaining skills but he does not move beyond this in his speech to consider what may or may not be regarded as learning, nor in any way suggests that he attempts to ‘make sense’ of his knowledge.

Later in the interview I ask Matthew to consider the various activities he takes part in, in school and to reflect on how much learning he thinks occurs in each. He provides a variety of responses from learning a lot in maths and French, something in science and religious education, to “German and music we don’t really learn nothing in”. I ask him what it is that he thinks makes the difference in the amount learned:

Matthew: It’s cos I’m better at it, learn more . . .

NA: So you learn less when you’re not as good at it?

Matthew: Yeah (. . .) Keep having to stay on the same thing like your work, can’t move on . . .

NA: And so you’re not learning new things?

Matthew: Yeah

NA: But in German, science and music you say they’re hard (. . .) you say they’re all hard and you say that in German and music you learn nothing whereas in science you learn something

Matthew: Yeah bit I like try a bit harder in science cos it’s quite important subject

NA: Right . . . Why’s it important?

Matthew: Cos it’s maths, English and science that are very important . . . subject

NA: Important for what?

Matthew: Getting a job when you’re older

Matthew reminds us of the role of perception of ability in learning and this will be considered in greater depth in Chapter 9. He also introduces very clearly the notion that his concept of learning is about Saljo’s Concept 2 and/or Concept 3. We cannot however, deduce from the script whether the reason for the importance of learning particular subjects is to reproduce information in order to gain credentials to be exchanged for

employment, or to gain skills and understandings that will be useful in the world of work. At no stage, reading the whole transcript for the first interview, does Matthew seem to speak in ways that lift his thought beyond the collection, memorisation and possible later application of knowledge or skills, in ways that are alluded to by Felicity through her conversation.

### **Some Further Stories of Learning**

As Felicity and Olivia are joined by the other members of their high status school in apparently attempting to make meaning as they talk, and as they are all members of the middle class, it might be thought to be inferred that what is being described is nothing more than the greater skills of articulation, whether written or oral that first became apparent to me in the introductory activity, discussed in Chapter 5. But on reading the stories of Isaac and Keith; Jenni and Katy; and those of Wendy and Tracy this explanation begins to appear too simplistic.

#### *Isaac and Keith's Stories of Learning*

Isaac and Keith both attend the intermediate status school. Isaac's prior achievement measurement places him as high ability, Keith as average. Both boys are, as far as can be gleaned from the information available to me, from middle class homes. Both boys talk of learning in terms of the acquisition of skills; neither indicate any awareness of making sense beyond this. Isaac takes at face value the notion that learning must be occurring in all school activities as learning is synonymous with schooling. Like Matthew, Keith differentiates a little more, segregating 'important' school subjects from others. Further questioning reveals that in Keith's mind, importance is symbolised by the number of tests taken in the subject and whether or not the year group is separated into 'sets' for the particular subject.

Keith then regards important learning to be about Concept 2. The notion of memorising, and perhaps more so, the learning of rules, is highlighted in his conversation about subjects or activities he thinks he may learn nothing from:

“We used to have two kinds of English lessons in Year 7 and we’d had two different teachers and one of them taught us things like verbs, nouns, adjectives and we don’t do that, we haven’t done that in Year 8 yet. We usually write stories ( . . . ) and not doing anything like I’ve said like nouns ( . . . ) I learned a lot when I was doing the nouns and stuff but now where . . . it’s nearly [learn nothing] English” (Keith)

He is not alone in singling out English as a subject that is ‘different’ in terms of learning although the response to this varies from ‘we learn nothing’ as in Keith’s opinion to ‘learning is more subtle’ (Sophie) dependent upon the individual’s notion of what it is to learn. Keith, it seems, sees learning most closely as Concept 2 and possibly Concept 3. The examples I have chosen thus far might lead us to jump to the conclusion that it is a ‘boy thing’, that gender plays its role in the concepts of learning individuals have. Jenni and Katy, and later Wendy and Tracy might make this causation seem more problematic. Jenni and Katy, we shall see, both heavily rely on Saljo’s Concepts 1 and 2 but Katy also speaks of her desire to try to learn for herself in a way that is less apparent in the speech of Jenni, as if Katy wants to make sense for herself rather than just to remember. It is to different conclusions about the learning of history we turn in the stories of Wendy and Tracy. Here we see examples of the differing frames of reference pupils may have about learning and how these affect the way they make sense of aspects of education. This section on notions of learning concludes with a passage from Darren’s story on making sense of the world.

### *Jenni and Katy’s Stories of Learning*

Like Isaac and Keith, both Jenni and Katy attend the intermediate status school. Both have middle class backgrounds, Jenni is of average prior achievement and, we learned in Chapter 5, requires additional learning support because she is dyslexic. Katy’s academic measure puts her above average.



**Jenni on learning out of school:**

“When I go running, in geography we do the layout of like Wiltshire so it helps me kind of know my way round ( . . . ) sometimes I have to help my brother on the computer ( . . . ) and there’s a lot on spelling involved with that so they get stuck in my head so it does help me spell words . . . “

**Katy on learning out of school:**

“Playing with my brother I learn how to understand people and what news he’s done and stuff, understand a lot about him and when we go to museums like we can go to museums whichever, like if I want to learn about science we go to a science museum, so if I think I need to do some kind of revision of science or something we like go there.”

**Jenni on learning in school:**

- Jenni: I’ve learned quite a lot in English . . . about the old English words and how it’s changed . . . and I’ve learned quite a lot in geography cos we’ve just done the rain forests and now we’re doing about deserts and . . . how they don’t have to be dry and sandy to be a desert ( . . . ) cos they can be icy and dry too to be a desert ( . . . ) I’ve learned quite a lot in PE . . . because we’re doing a thing called healthy heart where you have to exercise all your muscles ( . . . )
- NA: Can you think of times when you think you’re learning nothing at all?
- Jenni: Um . . . sometimes if I get frustrated because I’m having difficulty in something things don’t go in
- NA: What do you mean they don’t go in?
- Jenni: Later they don’t sink in, I don’t remember them ( . . . )
- NA: [As well as remembering] do you think there are any other ways of learning?
- Jenni: Um . . . I’m not sure really cos . . . I do a lot of my remembering by learning something and then it kind of sinks in so I remember it . . . but I don’t do it any other way. Some people do it different ways like

my friend Belinda, if she's got a French test she writes it down the words, the answers to the questions over and over again the night before she has a test so she can get through it so I suppose that's one way of learning . . . I'm not sure really

**Katy on learning in school:**

(From a discussion about what she likes and does not like about school subjects; the context is maths and in particular her thoughts about 'bad' teaching and the reasons for her teacher getting angry)

" . . . Discussing something with your friend that maybe you don't understand . . . he seems to like tell you to do this and then do that rather than giving us some different ideas like what we could do, like he seems to set out all our work ( . . . ) he like . . . kind of knows already like what we're going to do and how we're going to do it, like if we found out a way we'd like to do an equation that was maybe, we found it easier than his way he'd say 'oh no just forget about that way. Try and do it this way for now' ( . . . ) and then kind of like rub your ideas out" (Katy)

Katy believes her enjoyment for learning is enhanced by being given suggestions by more knowledgeable others and then thinking through for herself how to complete the task. However, she reverts to Concept 1 when she relates an example of increasing her effort because of her enjoyment, when she says of an English homework:

"I went to the library and got lots of books out from the Second World and so I read quite a little bit about that and got lots of facts and information . . ." (Katy)

*Wendy and Tracy's Stories of Learning*

Wendy and Tracy, at the time of the first interview both were pupils of the low social status school. Their family background is probably closest to working class though Wendy's mother holds a management position in a national retail company while Tracy's

father is involved in the computer industry in some way and it is difficult to determine with any precision the nature of his employment. Neither set of parents appear to have a history of further or higher education. On cognitive ability tests scores and national Key Stage 2 tests Wendy is graded below average, while Tracy is at least high average.

### Wendy's Story

(From a conversation about humanities, which she says she finds boring and I have asked her to explain)

“Like all the kings . . . King Lewis or someone Louis [laughs] (. . .) It's I just don't find it interesting whatsoever and I don't . . . see how that's going to help me when I get out like . . . and to work. I don't see how King Louis' going to help me [laughs] . . . really” (Wendy)

Later, when asked about the amount of learning she thinks takes place in various subjects she responds:

“Humanities I don't learn nothing . . . well yeah I don't learn a lot of stuff there just that King Louis weren't a great king [laughs]” (Wendy)

(Later again, she returns to a discussion about humanities)

“Humanities we just . . . copy sheets . . . more or less all the time (. . .) in humanities the teacher just gives us the sheet . . . er explains what to do and lets us copy . . . like stuff I didn't I just . . . I don't know cos the sheet today in it was just like about six words either side and it said copy two and one . . . and so we just like wrote down the sentences and don't even know what it says, don't like get what it means . . . and like . . . it's so boring . . . “ (Wendy)

But are these just examples of a particular teaching style that may be ineffective or a reflection of Wendy's view of learning? Scrutinising the interview transcript again, I find that Wendy provides little to help determine how she makes sense of

the notion of learning. Through out-of-school activities she says she learns nothing other than 'fitness' through roller skating and swimming, and learning new skills of roller-skating with her friends. In school she learns in art and RE, in the latter because she draws as well as reads and writes about the subject. 'Learning' is regarded by Wendy it seems, as synonymous with interest, fun, usefulness, 'ability' and 'understanding'. Teachers that explain more clearly to her, as in maths, or understand Wendy's viewpoint as in RE, help her 'learn' 'more'.

### Tracy's Story

Wendy claims she learns 'nothing', at least nothing useful, in humanities, describing as an example a topic in history lessons. Tracy makes sense of the learning of history differently from Wendy.

(Taken from a discussion on her likes and dislikes of subjects in school)

"History's good cos you can learn about the way people used to live and why things happened and how you could make it not happen in the future and things like that . . ." (Tracy)

In considering the likely conceptual underpinning of the girl's stories Tracy's notions of learning do, in some contexts, more closely resemble those of Wendy, however. Thus she does not believe she learns much in technology because although:

(From a discussion on the amount of learning taking place in school)

"You learn how to use the machines but it won't actually like help you really in a future life unless you want to like take up some sort of manufacturing . . ."  
(Tracy)

*Darren's Story of Learning*

Darren may be labelled below average in prior achievement. Although his father is described as a manager it seems likely that Darren most closely fits into the working class in terms of social background. He attends the low status school. Darren has a story to tell about learning French that highlights the role of 'understanding' in the conceptualisation of learning.

(From a conversation about what he learns about in school)

- Darren: In French we learn things like . . . um Paris and like speaking French  
...  
NA: What do you learn about Paris?  
Darren: Just things like . . . the tower and things about Paris  
NA: What about the tower?  
Darren: Um just . . . can't really remember, we just um . . . we draw and that  
(. . .) and then . . . Miss told us what it was called and that . . . then  
we just had to say it in French but I can't remember what it was  
called in French . . .

(Having been asked if there are any subjects he wishes that he did not have to learn)

- Darren: Um French  
NA: And what's the problem with French then?  
Darren: In French we . . . like we don't really have to learn it cos we won't . .  
. be going to France and you don't have to speak to the French  
people really . . . we're English (. . .) because like we're English and  
I don't understand about the whole language  
NA: So you don't understand the language?  
Darren: No  
NA: OK and you said that you learn to speak French and things about  
you learn about Paris and so on (. . .) How does the lesson work?  
What happens in the lesson?

- Darren: We um . . . first Miss she's got like ( . . . ) in French she got like all the stuff on the board . . . the, she's missed like gaps? And she reads it all in French and . . . and I don't know what it says ( . . . )
- NA: Does she ever explain it in English?
- Darren: . . . Um . . . she does . . . but then I just forget it what she says something ( . . . ) and it's on the board in French and I don't understand it

Like Tracy in technology and Wendy in history - in fact Wendy also sees little point in learning French as she will not require it for her work, though she recognises others in the class might have other needs - Darren shuns the notion of learning, in context, because of the perceived lack of relevance. Again, as with Wendy, this may be more a statement about the effectiveness of the teaching than of his concept of learning. Like Wendy, Darren believes that the only learning that he may gain from out-of-school activities are sports skills, in his case in football. Like Wendy he appears to regard as synonymous with 'learning', interest, 'ability' and understanding. Like Wendy, Darren likes drawing more than writing. When questioned further about drawing he perhaps provides some clue as to his views of what it means 'to learn':

- NA: So when you're drawing are you learning?
- Darren: We are learning
- NA: Right what are you learning then?
- Darren: . . . We do . . . cos we got like . . . we draw like symbols and . . . we draw them into our books then we learn them
- NA: What sorts of symbols?
- Darren: Well can't remember they got weird names . . .

Darren is able to recall the image of one of the symbols and draws a swastika. I ask him if he knows what the symbol stands for but he cannot remember and instead he begins to describe graphically a number of other symbols he is able to recall. Perhaps for Darren learning is about memorising 'information' for later reproduction and it seems for him, he finds it easier to recall pictures rather than words.

In the case of Darren and Wendy further investigation reveals that there is likely to be little chance of their understanding the relevance of what they learn in some subjects at least, for they do not understand the subject. This brings us full circle to Felicity and her dislike of French. To her I leave the penultimate word:

(On times when she “just wants to get out of it all” and consequently day dreams)

“Like in French when we’re meant to be matching something up to something else say and I don’t understand it and I’m just guessing and I think there’s not really much point to this . . .” (Felicity)

But the final word goes to Wendy for she once more reminds us as Matthew, Isaac and Keith have particularly, that, no matter whether one understands what one is supposed to be learning or not, some subjects are presumed more important than others.

NA: What about in maths, do you find maths boring or is it interesting?

Wendy: No maths, yeah I find it boring but that’s just cos I can’t do it but I think it’s going to help me a lot in my future, like my mortgage and . . . but . . . I just . . . I wish I had more help in maths and [laughs]

### *Summary*

In this section we have seen students speak of concepts of learning as the acquisition of skills and knowledge either for testing or use in other ways at a later stage of life; of the privileging of knowledge; of the importance of the role of intrinsic reward, as well as the part perceived ability may play in motivating people to learn; and of the sometimes close association made of learning and schooling, but perhaps more by some pupils than by others. Finally, the stories of the students have reminded us that when a student cannot gain access to an understanding of the topic in question there can be no meaning making, no sense and sometimes, as Wendy points out, no purpose.

This last point alerts us firstly to the role of teaching and the views students may acquire of learning through experiencing particular teaching styles. Wendy and Darren speak of ‘learning nothing’ in subjects where they do not understand enough to be able to begin to make sense of the topic. This may be because of teaching practices that are ineffective in helping the student’s progress. But it also raises a second issue. Rudduck et al (1996) found in their study of Year 8 - 11 pupils, students appeared to find it easier to talk of what did not result in meaningful learning than to describe what would result in a positive learning experience. In this study similarly, there has been a difficulty in some cases, in disentangling individuals’ views of their learning from other factors such as teaching, ‘ability’ and enjoyment. Part of the difficulty in communication may be, as Rudduck et al (1996) suggests, the “unreadiness” of pupils who tend not to be encouraged to express and explore meanings, as adults assume responsibility for making sense of what young people say. It is also likely to be attributable to researcher inexperience. As I have listened to the tape recordings and read the transcriptions, so have I been aware of a wish to have asked just another question, tried just a little more to gain a better understanding, noted a missed opportunity to delve a little deeper. Clocks cannot be turned back, the moment has gone and I can only surmise what might have been. In future research more thought, and perhaps greater collaboration with more experienced researchers, might help to find more robust ways of eliciting concepts of learning, especially from those students for whom communications are difficult.

## **Section 2: Why Learn?**

“Education has always had a dual purpose, offering personal fulfilment together with the skills and attitudes we need to make a success of our lives.” (DfES, 2001a: p3)

Thus speaks the privileged voice of policy makers, but what are the thoughts of those who are expected to learn, the students? What role do they see for education in particular and learning in general?



During the first round of interviews at age 12/13 the young people were asked ‘What do you think the purpose of learning is?’ Their responses show clearly that they, like the policy-makers have a very firm view that learning, at least in terms of formal education, is for a reason and that reason is employability. Of the twenty-five students taking part in the study twenty-three of them included in their answer an economic reason, some talking specifically about jobs, others referring to earnings. Of the two students who omitted the economic from their response one said she did not know what the purpose of learning was and the other gave as her reason:

“To get a good education . . . I’m not really sure . . . I always think it’s the thing you have to do to help you through life . . . and if you don’t learn, if you don’t get into school, you don’t learn then you won’t be able to get very far, I think yeah.” (Isla)

That so many students make sense of ‘learning’ by reference to the economic and, as we have seen in the previous section, conceive of learning largely as the acquisition of knowledge and skills for use in examinations or in later life rather than as a constructive process of meaning-making may come as no great surprise given my argument in Chapter 4 that the dominant classes privilege such concepts of learning and communicate through the discourse of the economy. Add to this the theory of social representations (Pollard and Filer, 1999) and we may see that the policy-makers can rest contented that they have achieved their apparent aim of linking inextricably education and the economy. However, children’s stories are never quite so simple. That so many young people make some link between education and the world of work is clear and is born out by other research (Cullingford, 1991; Keys and Fernandes, 1993; Blatchford, 1996). But a closer analysis of the data reveals some other issues surrounding the children’s thinking about the purpose of learning.

*Emerging from the data, other reasons for learning*

Second in popularity in the Class of 25, as a purpose for learning is to acquire an education, knowledge, qualifications and 'cleverness'. Fourteen pupils include these, though as we shall see later their underpinning 'theories' may unearth the potential for differential readings of these terms. Three girls speak of learning to support a family with one of these referring to being able to help her own children in their learning. Four middle class girls speak of learning being for enjoyment or to improve the quality of life, one of these four also speaking of learning to improve the environment. Three middle class pupils infer that part of the purpose of learning is for 'accomplishment', though this needs closer analysis to determine the meaning being attached to the term. One middle class girl speaks of learning creating a more 'complicated person' but this was not followed up to understand better her thinking on this. One middle class girl speaks of learning as being as much about socialising as about academia. Several pupils talk in very general terms about learning for life in general.

The work of Bourdieu on the acquisition of capital comes to mind when constructing this analysis. Also coming to mind is the observation that those young people that, when analysed with Saljo's concepts of learning in mind, included not only concepts 1 - 3 (the acquisition of knowledge) but also concept 4, (making sense) if not yet 5, are in the list of youngsters grouped now as having a broader understanding of the purpose of learning than purely for jobs. But what of the individual stories of the children; what might we glean from taking a closer look at some of these? I begin by revisiting the words of Felicity and Matthew. These are the students that I began my exploration of the meaning of learning with. Having found a difference in their apparent views of what it means to learn, I wanted to check out the similarities or differences in their responses to the question, 'what is the purpose of learning?'

### *Felicity and Matthew's Stories of the Purpose of Learning*

“... So other people, so you can know ... about things and what to do when you come to some ... and to enjoy your life more so you can become like a more complicated sort of person, sort of. It's not very well explained ... and so you can do things when you're older (...) like getting a job ... “ (Felicity)

“Get a job ...” (Matthew)

How stark the variation! Yet as we saw in the earlier section of this chapter Matthew and Felicity are both above average in prior achievement, but socio-economically their worlds are very different. Bourdieu's notion that in the working class, education is only legitimate if it can be traded for labour-market value rings inside my head. Felicity may regard learning as a pre-requisite for getting a job but she describes more than this. Is this purely a matter of differential linguistic skills? We cannot tell, though certainly throughout the interviews Felicity is thoughtful, detailed in her telling, Matthew is blunt and to the point. Referring back to each child's descriptions of learning, I note again the difference between Felicity, attempting to make sense, questioning, reflecting, describing her thoughts as she speaks, and Matthew, so much more the talk of skills and knowledge, the importance of subjects to gain a job: matter-of-fact, taken-for-granted. Is it a 'boy thing'? Background? Neither or both?

### *Keith and Isaac's Stories of the Purpose of Learning*

Keith and Isaac are both middle class boys who attend the same school. They are of average or higher prior achievement. Both boys believe the purpose of learning to be to gain 'good' jobs but Keith adds that learning is “to make you clever” as well as to develop competence in skills required in life. These boys fit the same mould as Matthew but to assume that one's perception of the purpose of learning is gendered would be to generalise too soon. In searching through all the boys stories available to me I come across William who reminds me of Katy and Nigella.

## *William, Katy and Nigella's Stories of the Purpose of Learning*

### **William's Story**

"I don't really know . . . I'm not sure [laughs]. I'd honestly say I'm not sure at all because ( . . . ) you don't really think of like, you know, stop that and think why am I learning, what's the point of this . . . I suppose the point in the end is so you can like accomplish everything, do something . . . you know get a job or . . . you know how to put relevance or something like that ( . . . ) could be like you know something a skill which you would have which . . . not many other people would . . . have . . . " (William)

William's thinking about the purpose of learning is not succinct, but it hints at the notion of learning helping individuals to attain a position separate from others, with perhaps, a rarity value. It is about gaining a job but it is also about status, prestige and it reminds me of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. But he also articulates, albeit with difficulty, that thinking about learning, being aware of learning, in other words being consciously meta-cognitively active, is not common practice for him. Nigella has, in the course of the interviews also suggested that overt thinking about learning is new to her.

### **Katy's Story**

Katy: To be able to get a job now particularly especially for women cos before there was kind of a bit, barrier between the men working and women working and now I think it's really important for women to be able to maybe prove to the men that they're just as capable of doing certain jobs as they are

NA: Right OK so that's the main purpose for learning?

Katy: Um and to maybe get a really like a good job and be able to get good exam results . . .

NA: Right so what's important about getting good exam results?

Katy: Um like I don't know really big exams like GCSEs and A-levels it kind of determines which college and or university you're going to go to and that's really important say you want to do a certain subject that um one college that didn't maybe do so much of it accepted you and er the college you really wanted didn't accept you kind of thing . . .

In this dialogue there seems to be an awakening of an awareness of power, of domination and subjugation both on grounds of gender and across the educational institutes. Whether this means she is conscious of the importance of the university she attends for future marketability in the job market (Brown and Scase, 1994) cannot be determined from this data but there is certainly a consciousness of differentiation amongst institutes of higher education.

William and Katy, then, seem to stand separate from others in the sample in that they partially believe learning to be a means of gaining status. It may be that for both young people the ultimate resource to be gained from education is financial and the prestige, or difference they allude to is regarded as a means to, or perhaps a symbol of, an end.

### **Nigella's Story**

"I think it's so people are aware of . . . sort of what's ( . . . ) basically, what's happened in the past, what's going to happen, what's you know, what's happening around me at the moment and things. I think it's important that everyone does learn cos I think people need to learn to be able to ( . . . ) you know have ( . . . ) be able to get enjoyment from things. I think ( . . . ) not necessarily always but, in some things, you know, you learn and you come back from school and you'd learned something that you've never done before so you know you can read and be happy and pleased and everything ( . . . ) it's, I think, you know, and also in the future just going of, sort of, I think, to be able to get a job and being able to

perhaps always have a better future that'll make your quality of life perhaps a bit better. I think, you know, , to be able to get a good job and I think to get a good mark, enough grades to go to a good university and things, you have to be able to learn and in the subjects that you like and things, if you want to really learn and it's really, I think, it's really important that you learn and concentrate on what you want to do."

Like William and Katy, Nigella recognises something of the existence of symbolic capital. She certainly recognises, as does Katy, differentials in the status of universities and jobs. Additionally Nigella also introduces the notion of learning being about enjoyment, the intrinsic reward, learning for the sake of learning, learning to be 'happy and pleased'. I am reminded of Bernstein's (1975) observation that work and play are sharply divided amongst the working class, whereas for some sub-groups of the middle class there is less distinction between work and pleasure. It also alerts me to the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) on work and enjoyment and the promotion of a mindset of flow. In Nigella's words there is also the notion of achievement motivation, the pride and the pleasure of having achieved. In Chapter 8 we shall look more closely at motivation and the rewards and punishments that may result in action.

These three young people, all middle class and of at least average intellect, then, see learning as necessary for employment and for providing additional reward also. But it is not only the educational elite that speak of more than employability as a reason for learning. Reading through the transcripts I find Kelly's story. While learning for earning is a purpose for education in Kelly's eyes, she introduces not so much the gaining of symbolic capital through learning as the desire not to lose prestige or reputation through the lack of education.

### *Kelly's Story of the Purpose of Learning*

Kelly has been measured as below average intellectually; her family background is that of the working class.

Kelly: The purpose of learning is to get education and to get a job and to live off that I think . . .

NA: Why do you need to get an education then?

Kelly: . . . Cos say you were driving and you couldn't read what it said and that's because you didn't go to school, you couldn't understand what they meant, what the words were, you couldn't read and things like that . . . and it would be pretty embarrassing

For Kelly, then, learning is about employment but it is also about skills for life, for 'getting by' just as Keith has inferred and others not quoted, such as Sophie, has intimated. Additionally, for Kelly learning is about dignity and the stigma of ignorance. With Kelly's comment comes a sharp reminder of the work of Goffman (1963) and that of Sennett and Cobb (1972) both of which point out the injurious nature of stigma and the strategies people employ to counter-act the damage.

### *Summary*

We have seen in this section that for most of the sample of young people, learning, or at least, schooling, is primarily regarded as a necessary pre-requisite for gaining employment. This mirrors the privileging of the discourse of economy in education policy and shows that one part of the dual purpose of education mentioned in recent policy documentation has infiltrated the minds of the young. However, it is less clear from their responses to the question 'What is the purpose of learning?' whether many young people recognise, or at least articulate the subjugated aspect of education, that of personal development, growth and fulfilment. Although socio-economic status does not fully

account for the variety of responses it seems that in this very small sample, those from middle class backgrounds, and especially girls, are more likely to articulate that the purpose of learning is for more than the gaining of a job. Individual pupils add their own interpretations as to other potential rewards gained from learning: life skills, intrinsic reward, self-worth, status, or, for Briony:

“Um . . . to help you through life, well school is to help you get a good job really and help you, and also it’s to help you make, socialise more as well . . . and make new friends . . . “

### **Section 3: The Importance of Learning**

We have seen in the last section the claim of the importance of learning in Nigella’s script, but how important is formal learning to other young people? In the first round of interviews the students were asked “What is important to you in your life?” This question was deliberately worded to ask about what was important in general in their lives so as to provide at least a crude insight into the possible importance of learning in the pupils’ minds. Only after being asked this general question were students asked more specifically about the importance of ‘learning’. Because of shortage of time, one student was not asked this question.

Eight of the twenty-four students included in their response ‘education’, ‘school’ or ‘learning’. Of these, seven said that learning was important, at least in part, because it was necessary for employment. The eighth respondent, Nigella a middle class girl, spoke of learning “about something new” as important for everyone but balanced this with the need for enjoyment and hobbies as well as, like many of the respondents, the importance of family and friends. In addition to the eight students, one student, Katy, spoke of “being good at things” as important and gave as examples activities both in and out of school that were important to her to be good at. She went on to link her competitive spirit to a possible desire to gain “good” employment. Given the government’s high profile statements about the importance of education it is interesting to note the low number of



pupils in this study naming education as important to them at the start of their teenage years.

Two further points of interest arise, firstly that of the twenty-three students listing as one of the purposes of learning economic factors, only eight mentioned learning as important without further prompting, and only two further students spoke of their futures in terms of jobs, as being important to them. It may be that students of this age and younger do relate the purpose of learning as being for employment (Cullingford, 1991) but that in Year 8 and, perhaps older, they do not yet privilege employment in their thinking, so they speak it, but they do not yet make meaning of it.

The second point of interest arises when taking into consideration which students named education or learning as important in their lives. Of the eight responding thus, six were students at the urban school and were dispersed across gender and ability groups. Of the two remaining respondents one was a boy from the rural school with a middle class background and the other, as we have seen above was a girl from the private school and she stressed the need for balance between 'learning' and other areas of her life. From such a small sample it is not possible to glean whether this is any more than a chance pattern, but the finding that a greater proportion of students from a working class background voiced the importance of learning than did those of the middle classes, may warrant further investigation and consideration.

Students who did not include some aspect of learning in their initial reply were asked a further question 'How important is learning to you?' Fifteen of the sixteen students asked, replied in varying degrees that it was important, eleven using employment as a reason for this being so. With Parsons (1984, cited in Wellington, 1996) comment that care is required in the use of prompts during interviews in mind it seems that with prompting, students do have employment in mind, though not necessarily at the forefront of their minds.

Of the four that did not state the importance of learning as being about future careers, one gave social skills as the most important reason for learning, one believed learning to be important but only in order that more important aspects of life were more enjoyable, one said she believed learning to be important as she did not want to fail or be held back because she had not achieved enough and one commented that learning took on an importance because her father was clever and therefore she wanted to prove she could also be clever. All four young people were middle class girls.

While it is clear that, given that nineteen of the twenty-four students asked, overtly linked the importance of learning with employment, the economic rationale for schooling is in the minds of the majority of the adolescents in this study, it is worth taking a closer look at a number of the stories told by the young people, for again these help to illuminate, not so much the similarities but the differences between minds. I again begin with the words of Felicity and Matthew.

*Felicity and Matthew's Stories of the Importance of Learning*

Felicity: My family (. . .) my friends . . . if I'm enjoying things or not generally important to me . . . my pets and my home and . . . that's it really

NA: How important's learning to you?

Felicity: . . . It's important but it's only important so that the other things in my life can be, more important things in my life can be . . . sort of enjoyable . . . though I do like learning sometimes . . .

Matthew: My family (. . .) and playing football . . . and school education . . .

NA: Why's school and education important?

Matthew: So you can get a job when I'm older

Here, then an example of similarity in so much as family and home interests take precedence, and the difference in expected reward from education, from the intrinsic

desire of the middle class girl to the harsh practicality of the boy with lower socio-economic status.

But what of the three middle class boys in the study? What have they to tell us about the importance of learning?

*Keith, Isaac and William's Story of the Importance of Learning*

Keith: . . . Family (. . .) cos they were quite helpful when I ask them a question they'd usually answer it . . . or they'd say look in your science book and that'll tell you the answer if they don't know the answer, they say look in a book

NA: How important is learning for you, learning things?

Keith: Very important if you're going . . . to get a job. You've got to be quite clever for lots of things. If you're not you might get a not very good job

Isaac: Education, friendship and family

NA: Why's education important to you?

Isaac: For future reports and getting a job and so you definitely need an education to be able to get a good job and to support your family

While Isaac's response of 'supporting the family' may be read as a male, patriarchal assumption it is worth noting that Wendy gives a similar response (see Chapter 8).

William: My life, being here . . . being able to do what I want (. . .) not being locked up in a cell all day long type thing (. . .) just like I'm allowed to do what I want (. . .)

NA: How important is learning to you?

William: . . . I would say it's pretty important, I wouldn't . . . the problem is I wouldn't really class . . . I wouldn't kind of class anything above it but there are thing I would rather be doing, other things than learning all day long but

NA: Like what?

William: . . . Most probably almost anything because [laughs] it's not, it's not I don't like learning it's because I don't like (. . .) I'd most probably say, you know, it's one of my top priorities but I wouldn't say you know . . . consciously. I think it depends on you know, what day it is. Some days I definitely say, you know my top priority is to remember to put a video in so I can record this TV programme but I wouldn't necessarily wake up in the morning thinking got to learn today (. . .) but . . . I would say learning is important

NA: And why is it important to you?

William: (. . .) because I know it will like help me in later life. I know if I learn now I'll get . . . a good job (. . .) I don't know. Yeah it's kind of I know I have to know things if I'm . . . to survive . . .

The first point to note is the reason Keith gives for his family being important to him so strongly bonded to learning, the topic of the interview. Contrast this with Barry, a working class boy who attends the same school:

"My Nan (. . .) because like she feeds me and stuff like that, she gives me food and she lets me sleep, well she, cos I live in her house and everything. She's the one that pays the bills and everything so she's like important to me . . . "

The second point of interest is William's story when contrasted to those of Keith and Isaac, for although their backgrounds are not dissimilar and their intellectual prowess all above average, excepting William's difficulties in spelling due to his dyslexia, and given that they all ultimately link education with employment, William alone stands out for putting learning in its place. That place, as he points out is not in his conscious mind, yet it raises the issue of Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', a disposition embodied so that it becomes as a natural part of the self. Might this explanation help to account for the variation we find between the overt connectedness of learning and work for some but not others? Is learning so much a part of their world that it has become an unthinking part of them? And if so, why William and not Keith and Isaac? Does school play a part? For

William is a member of the set that is privately educated whereas, Keith and Isaac attend a 'good' state school. These questions cannot be answered by so small a scale of research but they alert us to possibilities. What might we learn from looking also at the stories of middle class girls who attend a 'good' state school?

### *Katy and Jenni's Stories of the Importance of Learning*

Katy and Jenni are middle class students educated at state schools. Katy is measured as of above average prior achievement, while Jenni, like William, diagnosed as dyslexic, has attained expected levels for her age.

For Katy friends, family and "being good at things (. . .) better than some people" and enjoyment are important. Learning is important for gaining employment but she also wants to prove to people that she is capable. She regards herself as "naturally" competitive and says "I need to be the best at things" but she also points out:

"... my Dad's quite clever so that kind of puts a lot of well extra pressure on maybe to be clever as well."

Jenni's reason for learning being important is not that she is competitive or want to be the 'best' but:

Jenni: I don't want to fail [laughs] . . .

NA: What do you mean by fail?

Jenni: Um . . . I don't want to be like . . . caught back because I haven't done well enough or moved down a set because I'm not doing well enough (. . .) I feel like I've failed if that happened

Unlike their male counterparts, both Jenni and Katy appear to gain other rewards, or punishments, through learning. For Katy, as well as learning being important for employment, she also reiterates the story we have heard from her earlier, that she is also interested in gaining prestige, position, Bourdieu's symbolic capital from her success in

learning. She competes for a place and she recognises this in herself. Jenni also has an interest in position though she speaks more negatively, in the language of failure rather than success. Jenni reminds me of the work by Phillips and Zimmerman (1990) who alert the reader to the possibility that for some children a major driving force for motivation is their fear of failure. It is suggested that these pupils may work extremely hard because they perceive they have 'low' ability and do not want their worst fears confirmed.

One final issue will be aired: the importance of family in these young people's lives. Of the twenty-four pupils asked what is important to them in their life, twenty spoke of family. What is of interest here are not these students however, but the four who did not mention home: William who, as we have seen spoke of his life and his freedom as being important; Vince, who mentioned his future; Darren, whom we saw earlier as preoccupied with health issues, reiterating this; and Tracy who responded:

"... I think it's important that you do have some sort of education ... cos even if I want to be a dancer I'm going to have to get some education cos then if my dancing career doesn't go well I've got something to fall back on so I can get a career."

Asked if there is anything else that is important in her life she replies:

"... I think happiness and making sure like you're healthy and everything like that is important cos otherwise you like might come down with an illness or something that might ... like stop you going to school and getting an education."

Of note here is not that Tracy regards education as important, for she is one of the young people from working class backgrounds who privilege the importance of learning. Rather, it is that she stands alone in the degree of privilege apparently accorded schooling in her life. Yet as we shall see in the next chapter, non-formal learning probably holds the highest status in her world, through her love of dancing.

Finally, by contrast to Tracy's views on the importance of learning, Wendy, another girl with working class roots, but who does not reach 'expected' academic levels has this to tell us about what is important in her life:

Wendy: . . . My family . . . my job . . . caring about the environment . . .  
probably when I grow older my husband, like family . . .

NA: How important is learning things to you?

Wendy: . . . Not as important as my family [laughs]

### *Summary*

In this section we have seen that when prompted to consider the importance of education in their lives most young people bring to mind that it is so and give as a major reason its requirement for employment and later life. When given the scope to reflect on any areas of importance in their lives however, learning is not mentioned in two-thirds of the stories. The link with learning clearly is in the minds of the young people but it may not be at the forefront of many. Noticeably, in this small sample, education is more often mentioned as important by working class children, without prompting, than by middle class children and I have suggested that a possible explanation for this may be that education is so much a part of their heritage, that it is an embodied, natural, taken-for-granted feature of their world, unspoken. For the working classes, education may still be in its infancy as an assumed means of ensuring a 'better' future and as such more visible to them in their thinking.

This section has also highlighted that although vocation is a major reason for deeming education important, for some, especially girls in the middle classes, education offers other rewards, namely prestige, intrinsic satisfaction and the minimisation of intrinsic pain. It is to the notion of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and punishments that we now turn as we explore the stories regarding the motivation of the young people in the Class of 25.

## **Chapter 8: Actions, Reactions and Motivations**

### **Introduction**

In the preceding chapter it has been shown that in this sample of twenty-five young learners, at least, the vocationalisation of education appears indelibly etched in the minds of the students: learning is for earning. Given that there seems to be agreement between the purpose of education espoused by policy-makers and that re-iterated by adolescent school pupils, one might assume that young people have good reason for putting into motion themselves as learners to achieve their aims of gaining ‘good’ employment. But Nash (1999d) alerts us to the possibility that motivational theories that assume rational choice in making decisions that ‘best’ meet individual needs may be flawed, and that akratic alternatives may be selected. That is people may be able to rationalise theoretical ‘best’ but when it comes to actual action they do something other. To translate into Saljo’s concepts of learning, they may think and speak at the meaning making level or above yet act in a regurgitative fashion more akin to levels 1 - 3. This reproductive approach to their actions, Bourdieu argues, is explicable through the concept of habitus, deeply held dispositions that arise from the structures of society and from the unique histories of the individual (Bourdieu, 1993).

The government also alerts us to the possibility that not all young people are eager to achieve highly in school telling us that:

“For too many pupils, the first year or two in secondary school can be a time of falling motivation and rising disaffection. A review of research by Galton, Gray and Ruddock found 2 out of every 5 pupils fail to make expected progress during the year immediately following a change of school.” (DfES, 2001a: p. 13)

If the Class of 25 are ‘typical’ of pupils more generally one might expect to find about ten pupils not making progress and, assuming that the above is intended to infer that those failing to “make expected progress” are also those with “falling motivation and rising



disaffection”, we should find ten relatively unmotivated young people in the Class. Another warning however, needs at this point to be borne in mind. Claxton (1988) claims that teachers often use the term ‘motivated’ or ‘unmotivated’ as a cause or motivation for behaving in a particular way whereas it is actually a description for a behaviour. He goes on to point out that being ‘unmotivated’ is often assumed to be:

“... a trait of the learner, rather than a state he passes through from time to time. It suggests that Simon is not only slack at French, but at learning *anything* – because it is his nature.” (p. 35)

The degree to which a student is judged to be motivated is highly subjective (Ball, 1977). It may be that teachers regard those students who seek to please the teacher or gain high marks as being more motivated than those who seek intrinsic reward from the activity of learning itself (Sternberg, 1990b). It may be that it is not only teachers who do this but other adults such as politicians and researchers too.

So what can we learn from the stories of the Class of 25 about their actions, reactions and motivations? The first section of this chapter explores what the young people had to say about what makes them keen to participate in activities, what makes them want to learn, what puts them off being involved and what switches them off learning. It provides an overview of how young people think about what and how they are motivated but it does not tell us anything close to the whole story. To bring us closer to unearthing the complexities of why people act the way they act in the context of the moment, section 2 looks in greater detail at the stories of children, at the stories they tell about what is done to them as well as what they do and the way they rationalise their actions.

## **Section 1: An Overview**

### *Motivated to Do*

During the first interview held in the Spring term of Year 8, students were asked to talk about times when they have been 'really keen, hardly able to wait to get going on an activity' whether the activity occurred within the school or in their 'leisure' time. They were then asked to consider why they thought they were so keen to participate. Twenty-four children were asked the question, one not being so because of lack of time.

### **No recollections of enthusiasm**

Five students (Darren, Kelly, Olivia, Una and William) could think of no specific occasion when they had been really keen. The students range across gender, socio-economic and ability classifications; in the case of 'ability', based on cognitive ability tests scores, ranging from the very lowest to the very highest results.

### **Intrinsic reward**

Given the wording of the question which inferred that I wished pupils to talk about those activities that they enjoyed for their own sake, it comes as no surprise that when asked what it was that made the activity rewarding pupils spoke of 'excitement', 'love', 'fun', 'interest', and 'drive'. Sport and other kinaesthetic activity was particularly popular. Edmond, Isla, Kevin, Matthew and Vince all spoke of enjoying football although Edmond's enthusiasm was greater for watching the game rather than playing. Swimming was popular with Isaac, Rachel, Sophie and Wendy. For Isaac it was the thrill of river swimming in fast currents that appealed to him. Briony and Nigella enjoyed horse riding, while Briony also enjoyed hockey; Flo enjoyed biking; Jenni enjoyed tennis; and Tracy enjoyed dance. Students also enjoyed spending time with friends or family, Diane, Felicity, Nigella, Sophie and Vince all mentioning the former, while Katy spoke of enjoying time spent with her brother. Briony enjoyed going to plays and musicals; Nigella looked forward to trips to theme parks and horse events as well as going on holiday. Flo and Matthew spoke of playing computer games, Diane of her earlier enjoyment of

participating in the Guides, Tracy of meeting Wayne Sleep and Felicity of taking part in plays. While Isaac enjoyed PE tournaments at school rather than formal PE lessons and looked forward to the 'fun' end of term activities in class, Tracy was keen to participate in maths, Keith in geography, Felicity in some 'fun' projects such as she sometimes did in art, and Katy enjoyed project work involving seeking out information from a range of sources. Barry's interpretation of the question gave the response that he became keen to 'get on' with an activity in PE or science rather than listen to the teacher explain what he needed to do.

### **Other rewards**

Activities did not just provide intrinsic reward. Some activities provided an opportunity not only to participate in the activity but to socialise as well. In Tracy's case this was socialising with a 'famous' dancer and with it the prestige that this brought. Others enjoyed socialising with friends: Vince while playing football; Diane while attending Guides (although as she became older her friends tended not to want to be involved in organised activity); and Felicity through art and drama. Some pupils were motivated by winning or achieving, others by knowing they were doing well. Thus Kevin spoke of enjoying football because of a desire to win, especially by beating 'prestigious' teams; Rachel enjoyed winning medals at swimming galas and even if not successful was motivated by the competition; Katy enjoyed project work, in part at least because of the desire to find out how well she had done by the mark awarded. 'Doing well' was also important for Matthew in football and Tracy in all activities but especially in maths. For Diane, she also enjoyed gaining additional skills and accreditation for example for her ability to provide First Aid.

### **Summary**

While the majority of students giving reasons for their enthusiasm for activities named enjoyment other rewards were gained by some students, namely friendships, status and prestige, skills and pride. Only two students (Katy and Diane) mentioned the extrinsic reward of credentials, whether marks or badges as being a cause of their motivation and in

the case of Diane at least, the reward of badges was translated into the gaining of skills and pride in achievement. Katy, like Tracy seems at least partially driven by a desire to improve ability.

In terms of the types of activity that inspire young people by far the greatest were kinaesthetic, a far cry from the privileging of relatively sedentary tasks in the world of academia. However five students, mainly with middle class backgrounds, did speak of school subjects or activities that they looked forward to. This does not mean that other students do not enjoy aspects of school, for when asked to tell about the subjects they liked and disliked in school, all named at least one area. The difference between the questions, however, may be that in being asked to report on likes and dislikes the children may have been speaking more about preferences than interests, the former being a choice made where there is not complete freedom; the latter where there is freedom of choice. Thus the youngsters may like a subject without having an interest in the subject (Rust, 1977). The question about keenness to participate in, which occurred later in the first interview alighted more upon enjoyment than pleasure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), that is being actively involved rather than having passive feeling of contentment.

### *Motivated to learn*

Twenty-four students were asked "What would switch you on to want to learn?" The motivational rewards mentioned by the students are considered below.

### **No motivational rewards named**

Six students (Darren, Flo, Keith, Kelly, Rachel and Una) were unable to list any factor that may make them want to learn. Although the bias of the six is to those scoring less on standardised tests Keith and Rachel do not fit this categorisation.

### **Enjoyment**

Seven students (Diane, Edmond, Felicity, Jenni, Nigella, Olivia and Sophie) said enjoyment and interest would make them want to learn although they all gave other rewards that would be motivating as well. It is noteworthy that this group are biased towards middle class female students.

### **Economic reward**

Five students (Barry, Edmond, Isaac, Kevin, Wendy) listed money or jobs as making them want to learn. This supports the findings in Chapter 7 that the pupils did not always absorb the link between education, employment and motivation that has been shown in Chapter 4 to be a basic assumption made by policy-makers.

### **Gaining skills and knowledge**

Four students (Felicity, Tracy, Vince and William) spoke of wanting to find out about something that was new or that they had heard about but had no knowledge of. Katy also wanted to find out additional knowledge, but for her the reward was in knowing something other people did not know.

### **Achievement**

For three students (Felicity, Olivia and William) pride, a sense of accomplishment or a desire to 'do well' would make them want to learn.

### **Other motivations to learn**

Socialising (Briony and Felicity), aspiring to the standards of others (Sophie), in order to help the next generation (Isla) and for their own future survival (Felicity and William) were given as reasons for wanting to learn. One student (Nigella) thought that in order to be motivated, the teacher needed to make the subject fascinating while Diane said 'funny'

teachers would motivate her. Matthew inferred a compulsion to learn while Jenni also regarded learning, or at least, schooling as compulsory but added that once she began to learn new things she also began to enjoy them.

### **Summary**

While five students mention jobs as a motivational factor and two students believe teachers are influential in motivating people, this may come as little comfort to policy-makers who appear to be hanging their hopes of raising motivation by vocationalisation and pedagogic control. Interest, enjoyment and curiosity are given by ten pupils as reasons for wanting to learn while three give pride and two friendship as motivational factors. A further two infer compulsion makes them want to learn while one student is motivated by the fear of ignorance. When we consider the classifications of the young people who give the responses it is noteworthy that there is a bias towards lower socio-economic and ability groups not knowing what motivates them or to assume it is the thought of future employment. Housed amongst the 'don't knows' and the 'employment' groups are those children spoken of by teachers as 'problems', that is those who least comply with the demands of schooling.

### *Motivated not to do*

Twenty-four students were asked to reveal activities, either in or out of school, which they did not wish to take part in. They were then asked to reflect on what it was about the particular activities that made them reticent to be involved.

### **No activities**

Darren and Isaac stated that they had never experienced an activity that they felt strongly that they did not wish to take part, Darren also claiming never to have experienced any great enthusiasm for any activities.

### **Home activities**

Vince and Diane both said they sometimes did not want to do home chores such as looking after pets or shopping, although Vince suggested this lack of motivation was spasmodic. Because of parental arguments, Diane also sometimes did not want to go home.

### **School activities**

Six students (Flo, Kevin, Kelly, Nigella, Una and William) said that they sometimes did not want to go to school because of tiredness or a reluctance to get out of bed. In the case of Una not wanting to go to school was also linked to times when she was being bullied. Two students (Barry and Kelly) named detentions as an activity they detested, both – records show - being prone to being given detentions for ‘poor’ behaviour. Tests were ‘dreaded’ or ‘hated’ by Briony, Jenni and Nigella although Jenni went on to say that once she was involved in taking the test she became less anxious. Being asked to say multiplication tables in class was an activity Wendy dreaded believing she was unable to succeed in the task; Barry likewise felt vulnerable when asked to read out loud in class because of his perceived lack of ability to do so and also in some PE lessons. Wendy and Isla were both concerned about the comments made by peers about their lack of ability, in Wendy’s case in regarding multiplication tables and spellings, in Isla’s case in gymnastics. Rachel also felt a lack of motivation because of a perceived lack of ability, which for her occurred in hockey, while Keith would not want to take part in any activity if he thought he wasn’t going to get a good result or hadn’t ‘done well’. Olivia spoke of having to read a particular book that she did not enjoy and some activities that formed part of art lessons as resulting in her not wishing to take part. For Kevin, he sometimes does not want to take part in some lessons but he suggests that this is dependent on how he ‘feels’ at a particular point in time. Isla too has found some lessons ‘boring’ resulting in her not wishing to take part. As an example she gives a history lesson where the class were reading from a textbook with the teacher and:

“... he just kept going over and over and over the same things again.” (Isla)

Teacher behaviour, Keith thought, might result in him not wanting to do an activity. He was thinking particularly of teachers who shouted or were 'not very nice' but he did not give an example of a time when this had been the case.

### **Other people**

As noted above, Wendy disliked being made fun of by peers when she was unable to succeed especially in maths and English. Similarly Isla disliked the negative comments made about her work in some lessons by some of her peers. For Una bullying had at one stage in her school career caused her not to want to attend school at all. Poor peer behaviour and 'messing around in class' was also spoken of as a factor affecting individuals' desire to participate. Felicity was concerned about the perceptions people in general might hold of her and was less likely to take part in activities where she was concerned about others' views of her. Edmond and Tracy sometimes did not want to take part in activities that others wanted them to do especially, in Edmond's case, if parents insisted on him taking part when he had planned to do something else at that time. Time was on Felicity's mind, also. She did not like having to do something that she thought was a waste of her time, either in school or at home, if she would rather be doing something else.

### **Injury**

Three pupils (Kevin, Matthew and Rachel) all spoke of their fear of injury in playing sport, causing them to want to refrain from activity. In Kevin's case this was a fear of causing further injury resulting in him not being able to participate for longer. Matthew and Rachel disliked playing rugby and hockey respectively because of the possibility of getting hurt.



## Summary

The most frequently mentioned factor given as a cause of lack of motivation to participate in an activity was the role of others. Of particular interest here is the fact that only one student said that teachers could have an adverse effect on motivation, the student in question being regarded by at least some of his teachers as highly motivated.

A lack of ability was cited by four students although only two of these would be described as falling short of expectations by national test standards and thus the 'ability' lacked might be more a perception than reality. Three students talked of embarrassment as causing them not to want to participate flagging up a possible issue of identity and stigmatisation.

Although six students spoke of tiredness or lack of drive to stir them from their beds in order to attend school, there is no evidence to suggest that these children gave in to their 'idleness' and stayed away from learning activities.

Three students, all middle class girls showing little need for extrinsic reward to motivate them, to work toward higher standards, spoke of their reaction to testing. This is of interest when considering politicians' notions that in order to raise standards more testing is required. So far the only response to testing seems to be a negative motivational effect on already well-motivated and achieving young people and one must ask what effect testing will have on those vulnerable to nervousness and fear as well as those the government claims to want to motivate. This question will be explored in more depth in chapters 9 and 11.

Finally, two students stated their lack of desire to complete detentions, a punishment for those students not acting in ways required of them by authority. This is hardly surprising for the purpose of punishment is to deter from re-offence but what is particularly noteworthy, on checking their records is the continuation of unwanted behaviours by the two in question which raises the issue of the value of the rewards and punishments being extrinsically administered. As Claxton (1988) points out, for such rewards and

punishments to work they have to have sufficient intrinsic attraction or repulsion to change the individual's priority. Nash (1999d) provides us with alternative possibilities linked to sociological theory and akrasia and these we will return to when we analyse the case study in the next section.

### *Motivated not to learn*

Twenty-four of the twenty-five pupils were also asked "What would switch you off wanting to learn?" Of these only Barry responded that he did not know.

### **Intrinsic factors**

Three students (Edmond, Felicity and Isla) said they would be switched off if they did not enjoy the activity while six (Felicity, Olivia, Rachel, Sophie, Tracy and Vince) thought that if they found the activity boring or uninteresting they would not wish to learn, one of these saying that he would be switched off learning when his 'brain was not engaged'. These are all students of average or higher ability of mixed socio-economic status.

### **People**

Eight students (Diane, Isla, Katy, Keith, Matthew, Nigella, Sophie, Una and Wendy) said the behaviour of the teacher could switch them off wanting to learn although in some cases, all of whom are from the middle classes, this was spoken of as an abstract notion whereas for others it was a concrete reality. Matthew commented on teachers who shouted and were 'horrible' as having a negative effect on motivation but teachers who were unable to control children in the class, or who 'picked on' pupils 'unfairly' were also commented on by Wendy and Diane. Katy and Sophie spoke about the choice of pedagogy. Teachers selecting inappropriate activities such as too much reading from textbooks, or 'going on' were given as examples. Diane, Isla and Una said the behaviour of peers would have the same effect, while Kevin said that his peers may drag him into committing inappropriate behaviour. Kelly spoke of her own behaviour causing her not to

want to learn while Nigella said that when she was without friends she could cease to want to learn.

### **Relevance/Usefulness**

If the activity appeared not to be relevant or useful, four students (Darren, Felicity, Tracy and William) claimed they would be switched off learning.

### **Physical conditions**

For Felicity being tired could prevent her wanting to learn, while Isaac thought that a school day that was too long would affect his motivation. Flo found running painful because of a medical condition and therefore did not want to learn skills in sports that entailed running. Nigella thought if she was injured, for instance while riding, she may in future not wish to continue to learn.

Environmental conditions were also mentioned. Jenni and Flo both thought they were less likely to want to learn when the weather was wet or cold while Keith thought that the school environment has affect on the desire to learn, so a school that did not provide good catering facilities or had poor teaching resources such as computers would not motivate him to learn so much as one providing adequate facilities. Nigella also spoke of learning within a 'good environment' but did not expand on what she meant by this.

### **Assessments**

Nigella thought a poor test result may temporarily cause her to lose motivation while Katy said that the thought of tests would put her off wanting to learn.

### **Ability**

Finally, Matthew thought that, in music it was his lack of 'ability that caused him not to want to learn.

## **Summary**

From the results of this question it would appear that in this sample of students the most likely reasons for not wanting to learn are a lack of intrinsic reward and teacher behaviour that does not meet the expectations of the students. Own and peer behaviour in class has been listed as effecting a desire to learn by six students while not being with a friend is thought to adversely effect one student. As a cause for deterioration in motivation four students give lack of perceived relevance of a subject; perceived lack of ability, poor test results or the thought of tests also give rise to a small number of students feeling unmotivated.

## *Concluding the Overview*

It has been shown in this section that while employment is spoken of by a small number of students as a reward that will make them want to learn it is not the key driver. Rather, this study seems to show the dominance of intrinsic reward in the minds of students both in its presence as a positive motivator and in its absence making an action less likely. Teachers and teaching, while not appearing high as a positive motivator, certainly are thought in the minds of young people to put people off wanting to do. But what the overview also highlights is that even from just four questions there is beginning to be a complex web of answers. With whole scripts in mind rather than isolated questions this complexity is all the more acute, for while an interviewee may respond narrowly to a particular question, by building a fuller picture across a number of questions and a number of interviews both complementary and contradictory information comes to light. In section 2 a fuller picture is constructed through a case study to try to understand better the mesh of thoughts that form the images in mind, images that, whether rationally or otherwise, may permeate the actions of the learner.

## **Section 2: Wendy's Story**

Wendy's story has been selected for closer scrutiny for a number of reasons. Firstly, Wendy is an 'underachiever'; that is, she has not reached the achievement level 'expected'

of her age by policy-makers. As we shall see, teachers write of her as being ‘lazy’ and work shy. Her socio-economic status is perhaps best described as working class and she attends a ‘low’ academic status state school. Apart from her gender, she appears to epitomise the ‘problem’ learner as described by policy-makers and commented on in Chapter 1. While data does seem to suggest that more boys than girls do ‘underachieve’ as seen in Chapter 1, Wendy has been selected as recognition that some girls also ‘underperform’ and their stories need to be understood too. But Wendy has also been selected because her story especially, highlights some of the complexities that lie behind ‘poor motivation’ and ‘underachievement’.

### *Teacher Perspectives*

A conversation with two of Wendy’s teachers in Year 9 elicits that Wendy is perceived as having an “issue of effort and application”, that her ability is such that she will struggle, that she is “getting to the stage of not getting involved”, that academically she has low self-esteem and that she is underachieving. This is not a situation that has just transpired in her early years of secondary school however, for her records show that Wendy is:

“Very lazy and slow to organise herself. Rarely asks for help and does not hand in work!” (Y6 teacher)

“... There have been lapses in effort and concentration ...” (Humanities teacher, Y7)

“Wendy rarely tries hard in the lesson and spends too much time talking.” (Maths teacher, Y7)

In another context, however, a different story emerges:

“Keen to get started on her work (. . .) her homework is always in on time and by the appearance of her work she seems to enjoy doing her homework . . .” (Art teacher, Y7)

In general, however, the results she has gained in academic and intellectual tests show that Wendy does not achieve 'expected' levels. That is she does not reach the level of competence selected by powerful others as that required of her age range. Her science teacher in Year 9 seems to sum up Wendy's identity as viewed from a teacher's perspective:

"Switched off, more interested in peer group . . . relationships, quite able, but in a low set . . . she's in a low science set anyway . . . I think she could be in a higher science set but . . . doesn't push herself . . . probably isn't pushed by me . . . quite good verbally you know. If you get her involved in something that doesn't involve her writing or anything like that she's quite good." (Science teacher, Y9)

While she is not amongst those pupils in the Class whose behaviour is so at odds with the demands of the establishment that she has received the ultimate 'punishment' of exclusion from school (unlike her classmates Barry, Kelly and Kevin) she nevertheless may be characterised as a young person lacking motivation. Characterised as such she may be, but much more lurks beneath the surface of Wendy's story as told by herself.

#### *Wendy's View: Aspiring to be an Able Artist*

In Year 9 Wendy aspires to be an artist, a career that mirrors her liking for art as seen in primary school reports and in Wendy's own telling of subjects she liked at school in Year 8 and hobbies that filled out her leisure time when she was aged 12 - 13 years. Wendy believes her liking for art to be:

". . . because my uncle is an artist . . . I'm just good at art." (Wendy, mid Y8)

She knows she is good at art because:

“My mum and dad tell me I’m good. So does my uncle, compares it to his drawings when he was a little boy and says they’re same as mine . . .” (Wendy, mid Y8)

This belief is reinforced by the encouragement coming from her art teacher who in Year 7 tells her that her work is of a good standard and, according to Wendy, in Year 8, gives her ‘merits’. At the beginning of Year 9 when I ask her to tell me about comments that have been made by others regarding her work or activities she has been involved in she tells me that she is told that her art pictures are good. On speaking about national Key Stage tests, during the same interview, while showing her lack of knowledge of the system, she claims she will “probably get higher marks in art”.

Such is her desire to learn more about art that she tells me, when speaking about the “waste of time” that she thinks humanities lessons are:

“ . . . I’d much rather have two lessons [of art] in a week, cos you only get one hour of art in a week and . . . that’s not enough. I want to study more.” (Wendy, early Year 9)

Not surprisingly when I go on to ask her what she would like to learn about in Key Stage 4 if she was not bounded by the rules of school option choices she replies:

“Art for a day ( . . . ) cos that’s the one’s I’m good at and I get on with my teachers mostly and the classes. I get on with my art teacher really well . . . ”  
(Wendy, early Y9)

At the end of Year 9, when I last interview Wendy, she has made her option choices for Key Stage 4 and has, amongst her selection, chosen to take a GNVQ in art. Her reasons for selection are:

“Cos I thought they’d be the one’s that I’d be best at and what I’d be you know, a fun job I want . . . cos I don’t want to have a boring job when I’m older. Some jobs I think I’d hate . . .” (Wendy, late Y9)

Wendy does not stand alone in her desire to attain a job she will enjoy. Her mother, a teacher tells me, is eager for Wendy to succeed and does not want her daughter’s ‘disability’ to stop her achieving. Wendy herself shows us how her father may influence her thinking:

“I know that he used to skive school all the time [laughs] (. . .) he was a little rebel [laughs] that’s what my mum says (. . .) he don’t actually, don’t admit it but all of my . . . dad’s sisters they all used to say when we was talking about school they all used to say ‘Our Norman how do you know anything about it, you never went’ (. . .) he says you’d better do better than me cos otherwise you’ll just end up working in that horrible old factory . . . if the factory’s still around . . . “ (Wendy, Y8)

So, as far as policy-makers’ thinking appears to go, so far so good. Wendy has an interest, an aspiration, and she has worked out her strengths and wishes to play to them. Her parents hope she can be upwardly mobile, removing herself at least from the grind her father experiences in the factory. Her mother, who Wendy says has herself progressed from delivery lady in the mailroom of a large national retail company’s head office, to a planning manager for the same firm, has hopes for her daughter too. As Gorard, Rees and Fevre (1999) found in their study of adult learners in Wales, parental influence is found in Wendy’s story. Not for her the dreams of the ‘lads’ described by Willis (1977), to be their father’s sons and follow in the footsteps of their forebears into the drudgery of working class life; nor for her the place of Brown’s (1987) ‘rems’ seeking to get into the working class culture. For Wendy is the desire to move on, perhaps as Brown (1987) describes, to ‘get on’ within the working classes, or even to ‘get out’.



Yet we are told that there is a problem with Wendy 's effort and application; she has been described as lazy, switched off and lacking concentration. Does Wendy share any of this with us too, or is this only the perspective of the teachers?

*Motivation: rational action or akratic behaviour?*

Wendy does indeed admit that she does not always pay attention but is instead:

“Talking . . . talking or writing things or just not listening at all and just staring into space . . . notes to my other friends that aren't in the same classroom so when I come out of the class . . . I give them a note sort of thing.” (Wendy, early Y9)

In a style perhaps best described by akrasia (Rorty, 1987) she speaks of needing to pay more attention in order to gain better test results, yet:

“You know, some things I just think are so boring I don't pay attention sometimes ( . . . ) like maths problems like algebra and stuff like that in maths and in science usually in you know circuits and I hate stuff like that.” (Wendy, early Y9)

In other words, while the 'rational' Wendy is able to place effort and attention as a cause of her low results, she acts in ways to ensure little improvement. But why? What is it that makes subjects 'boring' for Wendy so that she feels unable to participate? She has plenty to tell us about maths that may help us understand.

#### **Wendy's rationale**

Maths first appears in Wendy's story when I ask her, early in the first interview (Y8) to tell me what she would like to keep the same at the school while trying to find out more about what she meant when she wrote that the school was alright but could be improved (see Appendix F).

- Wendy: Same teachers (. . .) same like classes but er . . . don't know my maths could be improved [laughs]
- NA: Why could that be improved?
- Wendy: Cos I'm really rubbish at maths [laughs] . . . I need extra help
- NA: What do you mean you're really rubbish at maths?
- Wendy: I ain't good at it [laughs]
- NA: What makes you think that?
- Wendy: Well other kids in my class get like higher grades than me and . . . like um . . . they must be good at maths and I'm not

Wendy has some thoughts on how the situation could be improved:

- Wendy: I think . . . everybody that has abilities\* should have a separate teacher to help them in class (. . .) cos I think I need it more and there could be other kids in the class . . .
- NA: And you'd want the teacher in the class?
- Wendy: Yeah . . . like just to sit and read it all through with you and make you understand better, not walking around the class so you'd spend half your time with your hand in the air (. . .)

*\* Transcribing from the tape recording, which has a lot of background noise the word comes across as abilities although in my field notes I have jotted 'disabilities'.*

Wendy has had extra help in maths and when asked if this has helped she responded that she thought so, as they explained "things properly". I ask her if the teacher does not explain properly:

"Well . . . yeah in a way but um . . . I don't know, if like, teacher tells you what to do and you like, I don't really know what to do cos er, hasn't explained it properly to me so like [laughs] . . . um not cos I didn't listen but I do, so I don't get the work (. . .) there is one teacher that comes actually, that she explains the work in a like easier way that you can understand her." (Wendy, Y8)

When I ask Wendy to tell me about the subjects she does not like at school, more is revealed:

“Should be maths, numeracy, French . . . um . . . humanities is alright as well. I don’t like the subjects because I don’t understand the teachers most of the time or I think it’s something to do with the teachers that don’t like the pupils. I think if we had like nice friendly teachers that we’d get on a lot better, a lot easier . . .  
“ (Wendy, Y8)

She is prompted to reflect on what it is that the teachers do that makes her conclude that they do not like pupils:

Wendy: One would be my maths teacher, he just doesn’t like me I know he doesn’t. He always picks on me. He knows I can’t do it at um . . .  
he just  
NA: What do you mean picks on you?  
Wendy: Like he always chooses me . . . to do something and I don’t know what he means or I don’t understand or I’ve had my hand up and then he ask me a question like when I’ve just been having my hand up to ask him what that means . . .

Later in the same interview in Year 8 I ask Wendy to tell me about times when she really has not wanted to do something:

Wendy: Saying my tables out in class . . . I can’t do them . . .  
NA: What’s wrong with that then?  
Wendy: . . . Er probably cos I don’t know quite a lot of my times tables but I try my best . . . um . . . and like other kids take the mick out of me. I don’t really care  
NA: Why do they take the mick out of you?  
Wendy: . . . They just like make fun of me saying ‘Oh you don’t know your times tables’ . . . but really I do . . . know quite a lot of them (. . .) the

teacher knows what ones I don't know cos I told him and them ones  
he always picks on me says 'Oh you can say them'

It comes as little surprise then that when I ask her what would switch her off learning she replies:

"Like what my maths teacher does to me . . . " (Wendy, Y8)

Of course, this may be a temporary upset in Wendy's relationships, something that at the time of asking is uppermost in her mind. She may have had a challenging maths lesson before I met her, or feel otherwise momentarily aggrieved, but when I meet Wendy a few months later, maths is spoken of again. In the autumn term of Year 9 I ask Wendy to tell me about negative comments that have been made about her work or activities she has been involved in.

Wendy: I'm rubbish at maths, stuff like that or I'm a rubbish speller  
NA: Who would say that?  
Wendy: People who are in higher sets than me (. . .)  
NA: What might they say about you in maths?  
Wendy: Not so much but most, sometimes my times tables I don't know . . .  
NA: So what might people say to you?  
Wendy: I don't know, I'm thick or something like that.

I try to clarify if this actually happens or whether this is what she thinks people will say, but she claims that it happens occasionally and that it is not a specific group of people that would say this but "all sorts of people". I want to know what effect she thinks this has on her:

Wendy: Get upset more or less or good comments you know makes you  
wanna do more, you know makes you wanna improve more as well  
NA: And bad comments?

Wendy: Usually just gets me down, upset . . . or I just take it and don't really bother me sometimes but some things, like you know if they something really nasty I do get upset and it makes me want to improve but I never do . . . I do try a bit more in maths now and you know that's basically it.

In fact Wendy claims that not only does she try more in maths but it is now one of her favourite subjects, putting the cause of the change of view down to a change of teacher. I ask her what makes the difference between the teachers:

"I've got a . . . female teacher and last year I had a male teacher who hated me and this year I got a female teacher who likes me a lot so . . . it makes an enormous difference (. . .) (She) pays more attention to my problems in maths and she helps me more. She . . . comes over and spends time with me and explaining about what's wrong with maths and where I'm going wrong (. . .) sometimes I go up and talk to her if I've got something wrong" (Wendy, early Y9)

So much does she like maths, or as we see below, perhaps believes she needs ability in maths for her future, that she even selects to have "maths for well two hours instead of an hour" when I ask her what her ideal timetable would include for Key Stage 4 if she were given completely free choice. This selection is based on her liking for the teacher and her new found confidence in her ability. The confidence and her affection for the subject does not last long. I interview Wendy again towards the end of the final term of Year 9. She tells me she hopes to gain good grades by the end of Year 11, but when I ask her if she thinks she will succeed she responds:

"I know I won't (. . .) cos I'm no good at maths and I'm no good at English so"  
(Wendy, late Y9)

I ask her what she means by being 'no good':

“Well . . . I don’t get on with maths, never have done [laughs] and English I’m not very good at writing in English . . . “

Would she drop any subjects from her timetable if she could in Key Stage 4?

Wendy: I’d drop maths [laughs]

NA: Why’s that?

Wendy: Cos I’m no good at it and probably never will be . . .

NA: Why do you think you probably never will be?

Wendy: Cos I’m thick at it [laughs] . . .

NA: How did you work out, what makes you think you’re thick at it?

Wendy: [Laughs] Cos I’m no good. I never have been, um I never get good marks in maths and I’m in a lower set . . .

So here we have a student, keen to learn about art, wanting to be an artist, confident in her artistic merit; loathing maths, certain in her uncertainty of the subject. I ask her what she hopes to do after she completes compulsory education.

Wendy: To go to college, art college . . . but I won’t get in there [laughs]

NA: But you won’t get in there, why do you say that?

Wendy: Because you have to get, a level five in maths, a level five in science and a, A grade in art but I’m good at . . . oh and English you have to have. You have to have all the same grades (. . .) and I’ll probably pass that in science art and English but not in maths . . .

And here of course is the rub: vocationalising education as a way to enable young people to remain or regain motivation may not be enough. Wendy is, or at least appears to be, motivated by art but her firm and lasting belief in her inability to procure the requisite skills in other areas bounds her ‘realistic’ choices. She understands enough about the system, or presumes she does, to know that limited places are rationed and rationally - to her - her chances of achievement are not great.

This leaves Wendy vulnerable for although she claims that she is switched on to learning by the thought of:

“My job in the future . . . and what kind of house I’m going to get . . .” (Wendy, Y8)

and sees the purpose of learning as being in order to gain employment, supporting family and getting a home, and hence may be regarded as being motivated by the thought of extrinsic rewards, she also at other stages of her story declares her desire, and that of her family, to have a job she is able to enjoy. Not for her satisfaction from purely extrinsic reward, but a wish to have a pleasurable means of earning. Yet to gain the employment she hopes for she must be able to attain skills in areas she believes herself incapable of doing so.

### *Some Theoretical Observations*

#### **Perceptions of ability: Entity and Incremental intelligence**

According to Dweck (2000) self-theories, that is theories about oneself, form a meaning system that provides a framework for the way people think, feel and act in given situations. She claims that the way people view their intelligence, whether as a fixed quantifiable state or a malleable condition, will have an effect on the way people make sense of their world. Wendy provides evidence to suggest that she holds an entity theory of intelligence, that is, she thinks she has a fixed inability to improve her maths skills: by her own admission she’s “thick”, “rubbish at” maths. But Wendy also provides evidence to suggest that she also thinks it possible to improve one’s abilities through additional help and effort.

In Year 8 I ask her if she thinks everyone is equally able:

Wendy: Yeah and no . . . um I think . . . probably yeah actually everybody’s quite able . . .

- NA: So everybody's the same . . . in abilities?
- Wendy: No [laughs] like well some people have got bigger abilities than other but they can . . . all learn the same things I think . . . and be as good as one another if they learned more ( . . . )
- NA: So everybody could do it but not everybody does do it?
- Wendy: Umm
- NA: Why do you think that is? ( . . . )
- Wendy: Those that can't do it will need more help . . . and when they've had that extra help they know it and I think they'll probably get the same as . . . everybody else . . .

We might assume from this that if Wendy were to have extra help and put in the necessary effort she should not doubt her ability to succeed in gaining a place in art college. We have seen that Wendy claims to put in extra effort to try to improve both when she is doing well and when she has not succeeded. Yet when I ask her at the end of Year 9 if she thinks there is anything she could do to try to ensure that she gains the requisite results to enable her to follow her chosen career pathway to art college a mixed message is forthcoming:

- Wendy: Yeah study really really really hard ( . . . )
- NA: Would you do that if you thought that you could really get into art college then?
- Wendy: Yeah

But then I ask her if there is anything she would like to do but which she thinks she would not be able to do:

- Wendy: . . . Well . . . yeah I would like to do maths, to be a lot better at maths . . . understand it more but I can't [laughs] . . . I'm just no good at it . . .
- NA: So do you think if you put more effort in you'd understand it more, or do you think that no matter how much effort you put in you'd still not?



- Wendy: Er unless I put a lot, a lot of effort in [laughs]  
 NA: It might?  
 Wendy: Yeah, but . . . don't, I just don't understand it so there's been some occasions actually I'm just, tired of it and all about

Wendy seems to hold simultaneously an entity and an incremental theory of intelligence. How can this be? If Wendy cannot achieve she has been told she must try harder. If she tries harder and does not achieve she must find another explanation: it must be her and here we see the resonance with the stories told of adults injured by their class (Sennett and Cobb, 1972). But does Wendy try or are the teachers correct in claiming her to be lazy? Which comes first, lack of effort or futility? And if she is 'lazy', what stops her from being motivated to do that which the teachers wish her to do?

### **Motivation**

Wendy's story abounds with reasons for doing other than that which the teacher requires, be it others in her class distracting her; teachers attitudes - and especially liking her, the person; or a purported lack of relevance of the subject:

"I just don't find it (history) interesting whatsoever and I don't . . . see how that's going to help me when I get out like . . . and to work. I don't see how King Louis' going to help me [laughs] . . . really" (Wendy, Y8)

"I just . . . don't see how French is going to [laughs] like to speak French is going to help me like in a job that I'd want to get . . . " (Wendy, Y8)

(Of religious education) "I don't want to become a nun. I don't want to become nothing you know . . . It's not my sort of thing . . . " (Wendy, early Y9)

Yet with closer inspection of the text again and again, we find that beneath the lack of relevance lies another layer of story telling:

"I was doing writing in the lesson I was just in, RE I think it was and I couldn't understand a word he was saying and he was just writing all the stuff on the board and I was just copying it out. I didn't even know what it was." (Wendy, early Y9)

"I just don't understand her whatsoever [laughs] (. . .) cos my French teacher is actually French and I just don't understand her [laughs] (. . .) I get the work but when she's explaining it like my friend . . . I just have someone else to explain it with, for me cos I'm like 'What did she say?'" (Wendy, Y8)

". . . In humanities the teacher just gives us the sheet . . . explains what to do and lets us copy . . . like stuff I didn't, I just . . . I don't know, cos the sheet today in it was just like about six words either side and it said copy two and one . . . and so we just like wrote down the sentences and don't even know what it says, don't like get what it means . . . and like . . . it's so boring . . ." (Wendy, Y8)

The description provided by Salmon (1988, cited in Greenhalgh, 1994) seems to sum up well what Wendy might feel, sitting through lesson after lesson:

"totally at sea, lost, without anchors of any kind unable to relate what is being offered to personally meaningful interpretations. This is the experience of being unable to engage with learning because it is impossible even to formulate a question."

And if she does muster together sufficient resource to ask a question, she must sit with her hand in the air waiting for the teacher to arrive to help her; a hand symbolic of her inability, a clear sign to her classmates, if any were needed that Wendy is stuck . . . again. How easy the move to Wendy is 'thick'. Ironically, through the very act of effort may come the 'certain' knowledge of her own fallibility. Yet, again, further close inspection of Wendy's words reveals another layer of her thinking in relation to her perceptions of the way others may regard her abilities.

### **Perceptions of Perceived Abilities**

During the interview held in Year 8 I checked out how Wendy thinks others perceive her ability:

(Of friends)

“I don’t really know, I’ve never really asked them but . . . I think they’d think I was like about average . . .”

(Of teachers)

“... they probably all think I’m thick [laughs] (. . .) I’m thick [laughs] . . . well specially maths . . . I don’t get on very well in maths . . . I don’t do very well in my subject exams . . . “

(Of parents)

“Well they think I’m quite brainy I think any way (. . .) for what I do er who I am”

Wendy groups and regroups herself contextually: from ‘thick’ in the eyes of the teachers through ‘average’ amongst her friends to ‘quite brainy’ in her parents view. But note the ending: “for what I do er who I am”. It brings to mind the work of Bourdieu, the notion of habitus and the ‘racism of intelligence’ (Bourdieu, 1993). Here Wendy appears to be placing herself within a range of sociological settings: her family, her friends and the educational establishment, but she goes beyond that, to relate her standing within a broader field. In doing so she appears to highlight an awareness of the boundaries that she perceives exist to suspend her in a limited space. Indeed Wendy’s story as a whole may be interpreted as an example of the adjustments Bourdieu claims people make to their individual hopes, aspirations, goals and expectations and the ‘objective situation’ they find themselves in, given their place in the social order (Jenkins, 1992). She and her family have hopes of upward mobility away from the drudgery of factory work; she hopes for enjoyment from work, something more than economic necessity: intrinsic as well as extrinsic reward: that which is often assumed only sought by the middle classes, Wendy

wants this too. Yet she is conscious of her place and her perceived limitations and this 'habitus' works on Wendy so that she adopts helpless behaviour (Dweck, 2000) in her learning, that may appear to be an akratic alternative to rational behaviour but which may seem reasonable to Wendy at the time.

### **Rational or akratic?**

The problem with rationality is whose rationality is rational? Rationally, given that Wendy knows she needs to achieve certain grades in order to achieve her goal of enjoyable employment in her adult life, and given that she claims that effort, along with additional help, will result in her achieving these grades, one might assume, at least in subjects that she deems important to her future, she would be working with gusto. But she is not. Instead she chats, day dreams and otherwise engages herself in busyness that will ensure the pleasant passage of time but is unlikely to help her reach her desired goals. Wendy describes the actions and reactions to maths well:

"It's the work that we do, it's like . . . it's complicated and when I don't get it I don't do no work and when I don't do no work I get told off and that's why I think I'm not very good at maths."

Why does she get told off?

"Cos it's like ( . . . ) I don't do no work and cos I don't have my hand up they don't help me and so I get told off for it [laughs]."

But if she believes that only a colossal amount of effort may allow her success and if she 'really' does not understand, is all at sea, is it not rational to elect to remove oneself from the action and adopt a different course? Of course, this course now selected is likely to narrow her options still further, providing the self-fulfilling prophecy of failed dreams and social reproduction, the one route neither she nor her family, whom she says are so important to her, want her to take. To fail herself is to also fail her family and as an only

child, this may be a heavy burden to carry on her shoulders. Yet not sufficient to change her actions to those required for success, if success is possible.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter we have seen that amongst the young people in the sample interviewed for this piece of research, while employment is regarded as the key reason for learning it is not thought to be the key driver in motivating young people into particular modes of action, in the minds of the young learners themselves. We have also seen that when we rely on a narrow range of questions we may be led to conclusions that are only partial, and may be unhelpful in providing greater understanding of the complexities of actions, reactions and motivations of learners. Wendy is a case in point. If we were to analyse her motivation from the limited questioning in section 1 of this chapter we would arrive at the conclusion that Wendy will be motivated by the thought of extrinsic rewards such as a good job in the future. But with a more detailed analysis of Wendy's story we find that, though she recognises the need to learn at least some aspects of the school curriculum to aid future employability, this does not ensure her cooperation in the classroom. Her actions which include 'off-task' activities, especially when she finds the work difficult to understand and engage with seem to reflect more her self-theories (Dweck, 2000) about ability, self-theories which may be part of her habitus, her socially and individually constructed self, her identity. These actions may, to dominant others, appear akratic in nature, yet to Wendy there may be a 'rationality' of sorts lurking within.

## **Chapter 9: Assessing Learners and Learning**

### **Introduction**

In the last chapter we saw that Wendy had concluded that she was unable to learn some subjects. While for some, such as religious education and foreign languages, she was unlikely to be too perturbed, for they were not symbolic passports to interesting jobs, for other subjects such as mathematics, tension abounded. On the one hand she knew she required a certain level of achievement in order to open pathways into college as well as to contend with the intricacies of everyday life; on the other she believed herself unable to acquire the requisite skills. Wendy seems trapped between what is expected of her and what she feels able to do (Reay, 1995). There are parental desires for her to do well by raising herself beyond the monotony of at least her father's occupational destiny, as well as her own hope in obtaining pleasure in addition to financial reward from her work. But these are coupled with her apparent helpless approach to difficulty in learning. Her reaction to this tension appears to be to bow out and find other more pleasant ways to while away the time, at the same time forming and reforming her notions of herself. Policy makers have a solution to such problems of misplaced motivation, that is motivation to do other than that expected: to increase the demands on students by insisting on an ever greater number of young people showing their skills in passing tests to a particular level. It is assumed that through the repeated evaluation of the learners' competence and by target setting to ensure teachers expect more of their students, the "Wendy's" of the class will be driven to achieve more. However, if the FOR pupils' hold is that intelligence is 'fixed' (Dweck, 1986; 2000) and their perceptions of their own abilities are low, then testing may do nothing more than confirm in their own minds that they are unable to progress and therefore they may resort to 'learned helplessness' (Dweck, 1986). In the first section of this chapter consideration is given to the views of 'ability' that the pupils in this study appear to hold.

Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that while summative assessment may have its role to play in education especially when carried out shortly after learning has taken place, for those believing in learning through interaction and the development of understanding, formative assessment is essential. This requires the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the learner in a given context, both by the teacher and by the learner themselves. Research has found that external “high stake” tests such as National Curriculum Key Stage tests and GCSEs, always dominate both teaching and learning, their function being to provide overall summaries of achievement rather than helpful diagnosis (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Moon (1999) argues that tests have become all important and GCSEs A-C or National Curriculum levels have become “inflated absurdly”; the information provided by the tests being a simple normative indicator saying nothing of the strengths and weaknesses of the learner within a subject. He is concerned that, far from motivating young people, assessment arrangements currently in use may, for some people only confirm failure. It is a sentiment echoed by others seeking to promote learning as more than the transmission of knowledge and intelligence as malleable (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Covington, 1998; Dweck, 2000; Fielding, 1999a).

Some key questions require further exploration:

In the minds of the learners,

- What are the purposes of tests?
- Do tests aid learning?
- What effect do tests and the results of tests have on learners?

In the second section of this chapter are explored some of the views about testing, both at national and local level, expressed by members of the ‘Class of 25’. We shall look at the students beliefs about the purpose of testing, the role of testing vis-à-vis learning and at the likely motivational effect of testing on young people.

## Section 1: Fixed or Incremental ‘Abilities’

In the first round of interviews, taking place in Year 8 pupils’ views about ‘ability’ were explored. As well as asking students to comment on their own perceived abilities in contexts within and without school, and how they worked out how able they were, they were also asked to comment on whether they thought everyone is equally able. In Year 9, at the end of the third interview, the pupils were asked if they thought they were not able to do anything they would like to do. From these questions in particular, but also from reading entire texts, an interpretation of the frames of reference held by the pupils has been made. The responses have been analysed in terms of the pupils’ having fixed or incremental views of ‘ability’ and the results are given in Table 9.1.

**Table 9.1: Frames of reference for ability: ‘fixed’ or ‘incremental’**

SOCIAL/SCHOOL GROUP; PRIOR ACHIEVEMENT BAND WITHIN SCHOOL	FIXED	COMBINATION	INCREMENTAL (EFFORT/HELP)
Private	High	2	
	Average	1	
	Low	2	
Rural upper	High		3
	Average	3	
	Low	1	
Rural lower	High		
	Average		
	Low	1	
Urban	High	3	1
	Average	2	
	Low	1	



The three students that appear to strongly hold a belief in 'ability' being fixed commented that some people have higher IQs - or standards - than others, that those who do not are not to blame, it is not that they do not exert effort and that it is not to do with genetics but is a physiological phenomenon. The students who believe that 'ability' is incremental speak of everyone being able to achieve whatever they want to achieve so long as they are willing to exert sufficient effort, and in the urban pupil's case, that there is enough help available in the home to aid the learner when difficulties arise. Most students gave very mixed responses, sometimes appearing to believe intelligence to be fixed in some way, speaking for instance of people being 'brainier' or cleverer, but also inferring that much of the difference could be accounted for by effort. Thus there were comments relating to people being equally able to do but some were 'not bothered' or 'mucked about'. Several spoke of people having different strengths and weaknesses but that overall these equalled out to make everyone equally able. Several considered that, while behaviour played a part, there were differences in ability evidenced by the sets people were placed in within the school and, in the case of one of the private school pupils, evidenced by state or private education.

The pupils most likely to regard intelligence or 'ability' to be incremental all were high achievers within their schools and all came from state schools. However, in Year 8 a further student, a lower achiever within the private school (but having achieved average or higher levels in terms of prior achievement), also appeared to hold an incremental view of ability without hint of any frame of reference relating to fixed ability. By Year 9, however, she spoke, in terms of her own abilities, of being not 'naturally good' at some subjects, that this would limit the jobs she will ultimately be able to strive for, and that although everyone can improve, there is a limit to their ability to do so.

Pupils were asked how they worked out how able they were both at school subjects and out-of-school activities. In out-of-school activities sixteen out of twenty-four pupils made comparisons with others; judged their abilities from comments made by others; or, in the cases of two pupils, by the grades or badges achieved. Twelve of the twenty-four pupils based at least part of their judgement on how well they 'felt' they had done at the activity.

Noticeable in their responses was that twenty out of the twenty-five pupils used test results as a means of judging their ability at academic subjects. Of the five who did not three said they compared themselves to others and one used the sets she was in to judge her own ability. One pupil said it was how she felt about her understanding. Tests, then, appear to play a major role in the sense pupil's make of their ability, but how do pupil's make sense of tests?

## **Section 2: Making Sense of Testing**

### *The Purpose of Tests*

During the second interview, held in the autumn term of Year 9, twenty-four students (one student from the original sample of twenty-five learners having moved to another school) were asked, "What is the purpose of tests?" This question was kept deliberately broad so that responses could be about school and/or national tests dependent upon the direction the student took in answering. This allows us to see whether national tests are distinguished from in-school tests in terms of importance.

### **Testing for Setting**

Ten students regard one of the purposes of testing as being for teachers to ensure the student is placed in the 'correct' set. Isaac, for instance, gives this as the sole purpose of tests:

"To compare the children to the class and work out if you should move up or down a set so, where like they are in the school, er class." (Isaac, early Y9)

Barry and Isla both speak of testing as being to allocate students to sets but also say tests are a means of finding out 'how well' the student is doing, while Marie adds that they are to find out how much effort the pupil is making and how well the student concentrates.

Sophie also mentions effort but for her this is not so much being measured by the teacher but rather, she herself uses the test results to:

“... work out what you are and are not good so good at and where you need to work more ... “

This mastery approach to learning seems quite different to William's comparative notions:

“I think they are to basically make sure you're at the right level and to find out what you have accomplished, what you've learned during the year or two years or whatever it is, but to find out what your actual knowledge of the subject is like.”

I ask him for whose benefits the tests are taken and he replies:

“Well in the end I suppose they would really be for you but the ones we have internally do help everybody. They help you know where you are in comparison to everybody else or at least your friends in the class and it tells the teachers where you are in comparison to the class and like what you find difficult and what you find easy and stuff like that.”

Yet when we read further through Williams responses it becomes clear that he, like Sophie sees tests as a way of identifying strengths and weaknesses and then acting upon them. I have asked William to tell me what happens when test results are returned. He explains that in all subjects the teacher would go through the paper and explain aspects that people had got wrong, but that in subjects like maths individually you would:

“... find out the questions you've got wrong, find out where you've got them wrong, make sure you understand (. . .) make sure you've got the ones you got wrong right or at least you understand so . . . if you had a whole load of questions on adding and it was like one add one, two add two and you were accidentally dividing them you would put that you knew what you were doing wrong.”

This process, he says, is done on trust. The teacher does not check that the corrections are made but rather William makes sure for himself that he knows where he has gone wrong. Should it be that he does not understand what the error is:

“I would ask. I would say can you explain this to me. I wouldn’t think ‘Oh no it must be me. I’ll keep quiet if everybody else in the class got it’ (. . .) I wouldn’t ever be leaving a lesson with something that you got wrong like not going through why you got it wrong . . . “(William, early Y9)

Sophie and William not only see tests as a means of judging one’s competence and assigning people to place, but also as a way of informing the individual about their personal strengths and weaknesses resulting in them acting to improve the situation.

Tests may also be used to prepare for future tests, whether these are SATs (Flo), or GCSEs (Rachel), and they may be to help gain a “better” job (Darren).

Briony, like Sophie, differentiates between types of testing stating that external tests such as GCSEs are:

“Challenging you to see how much work you actually do through all the work you’ve done at the end” (Briony, early Y9)

School tests, while also encouraging the individual to revise, checking if there has been improvement and “challenging yourself on your like terms work” (Briony, early Y9) are not so much about ‘challenging’ but are more:

“To see how the teachers think you’re doing and how you’re getting on in the class, see if you’re in the right class.” (Briony, early Y9)

It is not only a differentiation of type of test that is similar in Briony and Sophie’s minds but also the introduction of the notion of effort. In Sophie’s case tests help the individual

to determine where more effort is required, while Briony sees tests as a measure of the work done.

### **Measuring Work, Concentration and Attention**

Four students think tests are partially about judging effort: Briony as we have seen above but also Tracy, Marie and Edmond. Thus as Tracy says:

“I suppose to see how well you’re doing and how well you’re understanding the work and . . . I suppose if you’re actually trying to do well cos people can write things down that the teacher’s actually told them to, can copy pages from the board and copy from books and do questions but sometimes it doesn’t actually, they don’t actually remember it, the stuff. So people who are actually thinking about what they’re doing or actually go over their work and revise for the tests and that do, I mean sometimes they don’t . . . get higher . . .” (Tracy, early Y9)

For Tracy then tests measure effort, remembering and, perhaps thinking and understanding. Others speak only of remembering and, for some understanding. Others again talk of measuring ability, how well one is doing or where one ‘is at’.

### **Measuring Memory, Understanding, Ability, Capability or Place**

It is not possible from the data available to clarify the young learner’s meanings of the terms ‘remembering’ and ‘understanding’; whether they refer to rote or surface learning and are being used interchangeably, or whether, for some they assume a deeper understanding (Ramsden, 1988). Nor is it possible to more than surmise the meanings of the words and phrases such as ‘ability’, ‘how well’ or ‘where one is at’. Further investigation into the subtleties of the language used may itself be a fruitful exercise in better understanding the workings learners minds, but it lies beyond the scope of this research. For the purposes of this analysis, these words and phrases have been grouped together to infer broadly similar meaning. This gives us nineteen students who regard tests as a way of

measuring and judging what they have 'learned', whatever concept of learning, the individual may hold (see Chapter 7). We have seen above, that William speaks of tests as finding out about "what your actual knowledge of the subject is like" while Tracy sees them as being a measure of "understanding the work (. . .) actually thinking about what they're doing". Felicity, Keith and Nigella, like Tracy, also talk of 'understanding'. Some pupils talk of checking ability (Vince, Matthew and Katy) as well as finding out "where you are" (Sophie). For Kelly tests are:

"To see if you're learning properly (. . .) see if you're learning that subject well, so they know you've done that and then you can go on to the next subject or topic." (Kelly, early Y9)

Kelly appears to infer that the results of the tests has an effect on the process of teaching and learning, a move to another topic only occurring once teachers are aware that the student has mastered the present subject area. This may imply testing as a formative process, a purpose for testing mentioned by a small group of the students.

### **Formative Process**

To ensure that I had accurately interpreted Kelly's statement I asked her:

NA:        So if you haven't done well do you keep on doing the same topic then?

Kelly:     No because other people have probably done well as well so they go on to something different

For Kelly, then, the tests are summative in nature, but a small number of others regard testing as a way to help inform teachers of areas where additional help is required and to this extent, the pupils seem to view testing as part of an on-going learning process. As we have already seen Sophie regards tests as a way of discovering for oneself where one's weaknesses are and where additional effort is required. Wendy and Felicity also speak of

tests as being about knowing where one is 'going wrong', but where Wendy states only that:

"If we do badly on tests we have to improve, so you know where you're going wrong" (Wendy, early Y9)

and explains that in order to improve she would need to pay more attention, Felicity adds in the role of the teacher:

"I know where I've gone wrong and if I've gone wrong and I didn't know before then the teacher can like tell me and explain."

Jenni, Tracy and Olivia also speak of tests highlighting where additional help from teachers is required. Jenni says she receives the necessary help; Tracy and Olivia tell a different story:

"We normally do the test when we're like a little bit into the next unit. After we've finished the whole unit we don't normally go back on things." (Tracy, early Y9)

For Olivia, the espoused theory of testing and the 'reality' are not synonymous:

". . . sometimes they say it's to test how well you're doing at school like for a term and they have a test and they see how well you've done that term and how you understand it and then they say that if you don't understand stuff then it'll show in the exam and you can go over it but I don't believe that because they don't . . . ever go over it and they just like tell you off if you get a really low mark and you don't understand it . . . they don't say 'Oh don't worry, I'll help you through it.' They like shout at you or give you like detentions." (Olivia, early Y9)

The evidence Olivia uses for this pronouncement is not an event that has happened to her, but rather, to a boy in her class. Later, when asked if she thinks tests are particularly helpful, she re-iterates:

“I don’t know, they don’t really go over it with you. They just say well that was poor or something.” (Olivia, early Y9)

On this view Olivia seems to stand alone amongst her peers from the school they attend, all the others speaking of teacher support and/or their own responsibility to ensure their understanding, although not always in the context of testing, but regarding school work more generally. Olivia is not alone however, in inferring that little support is given when weaknesses have been identified. For some support is only given if enough pupils in the class have made errors. For others, as we shall see later, feedback comes in the form of being told to pay more attention, work harder or concentrate more.

While the reasons for testing have so far been given in terms of judging and helping learning in the present, two further categories of responses to the question ‘What is the purpose of testing?’ emerge from the data that look to the future.

#### **For future tests**

Four students, Wendy, Flo, Rachel and Kevin all see the purpose of tests as being, in part, a preparation for Key Stage and/or GCSE exams. For Wendy, the tests show students where there is need for improvement. As we have seen above, Flo believes tests provide the opportunity to practice skills to help when taking Key Stage exams or GCSEs, while Rachel believes that it is through the use of tests to place individuals in the ‘correct’ set that aids learning for GCSEs. Kevin, like Briony, differentiates between the types of tests and their importance. When talking about school-based tests he says:

“These are just tests practising for our SATs so these one’s ain’t important that we do sometimes in maths and all that, just practising them . . .” (Kevin, early Y9)



Both Kevin and Briony purport that they will work harder for the important exams than they do for school-based tests.

### **For employment**

We have seen above that Darren thinks that one of the purposes of taking tests is to aid the possibility of gaining “better” employment. He is not alone in this: Kevin and Una both state that the purpose of tests is to gain qualifications in order to be able to get a job.

### **Summary**

Pupils have provided a range of responses to the question: ‘what is the purpose of tests?’ Measurement and positioning are the most commonly held views about the purpose of tests in general. Nineteen students believed memory, understanding and ability were being measured while four students believed effort, concentration and attention were being checked out. Ten students view the purpose of tests, at least in part, to be about ensuring that they are placed in the ‘right’ set for their ‘ability’.

Six pupils seem to regard tests not only as a measure but also to identify where weaknesses exist so that additional help can be sought (Felicity), given (Jenni, Olivia and Tracy), although Olivia and Tracy imply that such help is not always forthcoming, or extra effort made (Sophie) or attention paid (Wendy).

Tests taken early in the school career are, for four people partly used to help students gain test skills for tests that we shall see later, are in some minds, at least privileged in importance: Key Stage tests to an extent and GCSEs especially. For three students the purpose of ‘tests’ (unspecified) is to help the individual gain employment.

### *The Purpose of National Key Stage Tests*

The results above were gleaned from a question about tests in general made of the children in the first term of Year 9. During the same interview nineteen of the twenty-four students were also asked what the purpose of Key Stage tests were. The responses have been grouped as given below. While students seemed, in general to be unsure of the purpose, only three of the nineteen said they did not know the purpose of Key Stage tests and did not then follow this with some form of explanation. One of the three later inferred that the tests were to show how well the student had done at the last school and she - Jenni - has been included in the first category.

#### **Performance, progress and ability**

Ten students regarded Key Stage tests as a means of determining how well the pupil was doing, whether this was in terms of the progression made between Year 6 and Year 9 (Marie) or in comparison to other pupils (Isaac); or in terms of effort (Tracy) or understanding (Nigella). This knowledge may be required in order to inform the next school of the pupil's performance (Flo) or to decide if a student is "good enough" for a particular school (Felicity). It may be needed to aid subject selection for Key Stage 4 (Wendy); to find out whether the pupil is on the "right track" (Katy) for GCSEs, or to compare students for GCSE's (Isaac); or to check that the pupil is working hard enough to achieve his/her goals in the future (Tracy). For Kevin Key Stage tests are to find out:

"... the subjects you're good at and all for when you come up to secondary school like to help the teachers help you."

#### **Setting**

I ask Kevin how Key Stage tests will help teachers to help the pupil:

“Like you go in set don’t you . . . and get sets for like the good people and the bad ones are at the bottom and all that and the teachers help them more and that.”

Darren also believes Key Stage tests to be taken in order that students are placed in sets.

### **Option choices**

We have seen above that Wendy, Katy and Isaac think an assessment of one’s performance is required for checking on progress prior to GCSE courses commencing. Isla also regards Key Stage tests as being to ensure “you’ve made the right choices” for GCSE subjects. Given that all the Key Stage tests are in subjects that are compulsory in Years 10 and 11 this shows some misunderstandings about the options process, understandable given that at the time of the interviews the pupils were only commencing this process.

### **Comparison of teaching/schools**

Six students - Briony, Felicity, Nigella, Sophie, Edmond and Matthew - thought that Key Stage tests were for use by the government to check on general levels of education, and the competence of students, teachers and schools. As Nigella says:

“ . . . I think it’s to see, is it that the government, just to be able to see how the school was doing to you and how you’re doing not so much as an individual, cos in a test it’s ( . . . ) to see how well you’re doing, but in SATs it’s not so much for GCSEs and A-levels and things but SATs are more for so the government and people outside the school see how well the school’s teaching you and ( . . . ) in general pupils understanding.”

### **Summary**

Ten students spoke of Key Stage tests being about assessing pupil progress or finding out ‘how well’ students were performing. For two students the purpose was to ensure that

pupils were placed in the 'correct' set. Of these two students, one believes setting is a means of ensuring pupils get the amount of help they require, "bad" people being given more help in the lower sets. Six students however regarded the tests as being about accountability, a governmental check on the teaching and school standards rather than the students per se. Fielding (1999a) asks whether target setting can be both developmental and accountable; one may wish to ask here, are tests able to judge and develop the individual; be used to account for school progress, and motivate young people, too?

### *Categorising Pupils: The Meaning of 'Levels'*

During the second interview, early in Year 9, I asked the twenty-four students in the sample about the results they had gained in their Key Stage 2 tests, taken two years previously. Twenty-one students provided the levels they thought they had attained in at least some of the three subjects they were tested on at the end of their primary education. One student could not remember the levels but thought his results had been 'pretty' good; one student said she had never been given the results as they had been passed directly to the secondary school she now attended; and one girl had not taken the tests. It is not possible to verify the students results as, where access has been available to pupil records, these have either been missing or have contained only teacher assessed levels made by the students' primary school teachers. However, these levels and those given by the children show that it is likely that the students have tended to be quite accurate in memorising their results.

Of the twenty-one students providing at least one level they thought they had achieved, twenty were asked what the 'level' meant. Their responses provide evidence for the claim made by Moon (1999):

"The symbols change, IQ to National Curriculum levels, but the distribution remains the same. Seven-year-olds are sorted into National Curriculum levels 3, 2 and 1 - high, average and low. Five-year-olds are given baseline grades A, B, C. High, average and low repeated like a mantra." (p.125)

Twelve twelve-year-olds, chant the mantra, too. For example:

“SATs go up to six and six is very good and five is very good as well and four’s average, just above average and three’s average and two’s just below and then one’s really poor . . . “ (Briony, level 4 at Key Stage 2)

Of the twelve students only Katy added any explanation that showed that testing may go beyond the allocation of a score used to judge pupils:

“[Level 5 means] I’m above average, I’m just above average and that I can concentrate well and take information in and use it in different ways.”

Of the eight other students providing an explanation as to the meaning of the ‘levels’ given as results of the Key Stage tests, William and Vince, not included in the twelve students speaking of ‘averages’, nevertheless, see the levels as translating into a score, but in percentage terms:

“[Level four means] you’ve got like numbers of one to five or six, I think it was and that’s how good you are I think . . . if you had all fives you were 100% and if you had all ones you were like down there in 10, 5% so you weren’t that good at things if you had things like that.” (Vince)

Nigella regarded the level as a governmentally decided normative value:

“I think four’s are . . . is it how good, it’s how the sort of government think you should be at and five is just, it’s OK, it’s a little bit better than that, it’s OK and then there’s three, two and one, just I’m not too sure what they mean but . . . “

Felicity, Sophie and Una did not know the meaning of the ‘levels’ and Wendy, while not knowing what the levels meant added that she thought they were used to place pupils in

sets when moving from primary to secondary school. Finally Tracy had this to say about the meaning of the levels awarded:

“ . . . Your ability to be able to do the subject and how well you can understand it and actually put it down on paper so that they can see that you know what you are doing.”

In other words, the tests determine your ability to play the game of testing and show the examiners that you at least understand what it is they look for; that you can communicate your knowledge of a subject, though as with the other students whether this knowledge is of a deep or surface nature (Ramsden, 1988) is not clear from the pupils' responses.

### **Summary**

Early in their third year of Key Stage 3 the majority of the young people in the study appear to see national Key Stage 2 testing as a process of classification. It is about positioning them, placing them. Even the two students placed, perhaps optimistically in the 'skills and knowledge' category make only vague references to the test levels being about any form of learning. One of the two pupils in this category said the levels showed students' ability and understanding of a subject as well as their ability to communicate their knowledge and understanding to the examiners. The other student in the category spoke of the level being an 'average' and added that it showed her ability to concentrate well, to take in information and to use the information in different ways. It may be deduced from this data that in this small sample of students the overwhelming view of national Key Stage tests is of their 'categoric' nature. At no point was there any sense that students regarded levels as shorthand descriptors of learning objectives. The pupils talked of numbers and 'averages'; they said nothing of what the level was supposed to show they had learned, still less what they still needed to learn in order to achieve the next level.

### *Categoric or formative assessment?*

It is not possible to determine from the data available what follow-up there may be from national tests in order to make use of the assessment in a formative way. However, the students were asked to talk about what happened after they received test results generally. Sixteen students spoke of teachers going through the work afterwards, especially if a large number of people in the class had made errors on the same questions. Four children told of having to correct errors although one of these said she usually does not do this. Seven students mentioned teachers giving feedback in terms of needing to try harder, concentrate more or listen in class. Some students either had to or requested to retake tests while others claimed they revised harder in subsequent tests. There were three responses regarding after school clubs run by the school to help the students but only one of the three pupils had used the service and he had not found it helpful. One student asked for parental help if test results were low while another student had received private tuition in a bid to improve his marks.

In general it seems that national testing is viewed by the students as a hoop they must jump through in order to be labelled by their 'ability' since the formative feedback was not systematic and at best were either too specific or too general. In order to check out whether teachers use national tests to aid the teaching and learning process much more research would be required, interviewing teachers and pupils as well as observing actual practice. This lies beyond the scope of the thesis. But whatever the 'reality', the perception of the learners appears to show that they believe national testing is a process of placing more than learning; a valuation of the child and the child's ability.

### *Key Stage 3 Tests*

Students were interviewed shortly after completion of their Key Stage 3 tests. The private school is not obliged to use these tests but for the first time had chosen to make use of the maths test that, according to a senior member of staff at the school, were supposed to be the best predictor of GCSE results, and for this reason the school had introduced the test.

The pupils at the two state schools took national Key Stage tests in English, maths and science. The sample size has, by the end of Year 9 reduced to twenty-three students, another student having left the urban school.

During this third and final round of interviews students were asked specifically about the work they had done in preparation for the tests, about the purpose of learning specific topics in English, maths and science prior to the tests, and about what they thought they had learned by taking the tests. It is to this last question we turn first, before looking in more detail at the students' perceptions of what and why they were learning topics in the core subjects.

#### **Learning through testing**

All twenty-three remaining students in the sample were asked 'Do you think you learned anything by taking the tests?' From this, questions followed as to what they thought they had learned, if anything and for ten students, why they thought they needed to take the tests. These follow-up questions evolved during the interview dependent upon the answers given by the students and are therefore not common to all members of the sample.

#### **Why take the national tests?**

We saw earlier in the chapter that the reason for taking national tests most commonly given by the students was to position them by ability, although six students believed the tests were less a judgement on themselves and more one to measure the quality of teachers and schools; two students believed at least part of the purpose of taking national tests were so teachers were able to place students into the 'correct' sets for future learning; and four students thought the national tests were to help ensure 'correct' options were selected for Key Stage 4.

By the end of Year 9, with Key Stage 3 tests only just having been taken, the ten students who spoke of the reasons for the tests being taken had a slightly different perception



although some continuity could be traced. Slightly fewer, proportionately, spoke of tests as a means of general categorisation, more as a way of determining the set a pupil should be in. Slightly more proportionately claimed the tests to be for the government to compare schools, teaching or pupils.

#### *Categorising ability*

Three pupils, Kelly, Edmond and Vince, at the end of Year 9 believed the tests to be about a measure of the pupil's ability, comparing pupils nationally (Kelly), comparing individual progress (Edmond) and providing a grade for use in gaining future employment (Vince). Both Vince and Edmond thought not only that the tests are to measure ability but are also to be viewed pragmatically. Their practicality is in their use for grouping pupils in ability sets.

#### *Setting*

As well as Edmond and Vince, Sophie and Barry also believe Key Stage tests are required in order to ascertain the set into which a student should be placed. For Sophie and Edmond this is a move away from their notions at the beginning of the year when they decreed that Key Stage tests were for governmental purposes and the ability of the school, rather than the individual, although Sophie may still be inferring something of the kind when she says:

“To see how we were doing in relation to other people in our class and then, other school and things . . .”

#### *Comparison of teaching/schools*

At the end of Year 9 as well as Sophie's inference above, Felicity, Isaac and Keith also spoke of Key Stage tests being for governmental purposes to check on the quality of education generally and on schools and pupils particularly.

### *Formative Uses*

Felicity, as well as believing tests to be for governmental uses also thinks that they are for the use of teachers:

“So our teachers know what we don’t know, the things that we can’t remember, what they need to tap in on . . .”

Notice, the use of the term ‘remember’ here. One is left to wonder if this means teachers, in Felicity’s mind will concentrate more thoroughly on the transmission of knowledge and rote learning, in future.

For Matthew Key Stage 3 tests are a means of preparing pupils for the more important GCSE examinations. He believes that by taking the tests he is able to learn how to prepare for GCSEs: it is about the practice of the skill of test taking. He goes on:

“If you’re like not prepared for them [GCSEs] you ain’t going to get very good scores and won’t get a job.”

Una also thinks Key Stage 3 tests are an opportunity to learn about and practice test skills, such as communicating effectively with the examiner. Matthew and Una are not alone in claiming that what they learned is about such skills as we shall see shortly when we look at the responses gathered to the question ‘Do you think you have learned anything by taking the tests?’ But first, a brief summary of the above section is called for.

### *Summary*

This very small sample of students tend toward seeing tests as a categoric assessment useful for setting and national comparisons. Three speak of the tests as having a formative role, either in aiding teachers to determine where additional work is required or as a preparation of students for future, more important tests.

### **Learning from Key Stage 3 tests**

All twenty-three students were asked whether they thought they had learned anything from the process of taking the Key Stage 3 tests. Of these, seven responded that they had learned nothing from the test although William thought the tests had been helpful as areas of uncertainty had been clarified and having to revise probably resulted in remembering key points required in the subjects in subsequent years. The seven students replying negatively ranged across gender, socio-economic status and ability although there were no students represented from the urban school.

Three students were unsure as to their response. Briony at first said no but changed to yes in so much as she had learned through revising, though she could no longer remember what she had learned. Rachel thought she had learned “a bit”, again by revising although she claimed to already know most of the work. Darren, while saying that he hadn’t “really” learned anything then said he had learned about the organisation and behaviour required in an examination room.

This leaves twelve students who responded positively to the question. These students, a mixture of gender, class ability and school gave a range of answers as to what they had learned from taking the tests, an analysis of which is given below.

#### *Test skills*

We have already seen that Matthew and Una believe that the Key Stage 3 tests help students prepare for future examinations. They are joined by seven other pupils, all of whom say that they have learned about test technique in some way whether this be the amount of revision required (Nigella, Isla, Katy, Mathew and Vince); communicating knowledge to examiners in a written format (Kevin and Una); concentrating (Katy); or a general attitude to examinations (Nigella, Isla, Jenni and Edmond). This last category included keeping calm (Edmond), not being scared (Jenni) and learning how to cope under pressure (Isla).

Fielding (1999a) claims there are signs that teachers feel compelled to get students through tests rather than developing a broader understanding of the subject; that there is a suggestion that there may be more anxious and depressed young people because of the pressures of testing; and that young people may increasingly be questioning whether schools are genuinely interested in them rather than league table positions.

### *Memory*

Wendy believed that by taking the Key Stage 3 tests she was aided in remembering although when asked to recall something she could remember she was unable to do so. Nevertheless she claimed that:

“If I had [an] algebra test in front of me now I’d know how to get on with it. I wouldn’t sit there and just look at it . . . in English I’d probably like, Macbeth I knows what goes on in there now, something like that.”

### *Clarification*

For Flo and Marie the learning occurred prior to the tests during the preparation period where, as William also pointed out, it was possible to ask teachers to clarify aspects of the work that students were uncertain about.

### *Summary*

Within this study we see that students may believe they learn from taking Key Stage tests. This learning includes the gaining of knowledge and experience of skills required in examinations, the recapping and memorisation of knowledge previously taught to the students and the clarification of aspects of work that students have not previously understood.

## Memories of the tests

As an introduction to the set of questions on Key Stage 3 tests used in the third round of interviews students were asked to talk generally about the tests. Four main categories emerged from their responses: the degree of difficulty or ease of the tests, levels, anxiety and practical arrangements.

### *Difficulty/Ease*

Fifteen of the twenty-three students spoke about the level of difficulty they experienced in the examinations. For some it was no more than a comment that they found one subject area more difficult than another; others elaborated on their answers and perhaps provided an insight into what they wanted me to believe the reason for their findings were.

“I found the actual exam reasonably difficult but that’s basically because I’m not particularly good at maths but . . . before hand it was helpful because we were given sort of practice papers which had been sort of used in 1996, 1998 and things and so we were given a few of those to do and we got a revision sheet of everything you’d need to know for each of the thing and that was helpful although . . . to be honest I, that was a really good, that would have been a really good way of helping you to learn but I just didn’t. I just didn’t think I did enough work for it. I did, I’m not sure why it was. I think mainly it was because . . . the main sort of revision part was in the Easter holidays and I just really didn’t want to work in the holidays so I sort of, just didn’t work as much as I should of. I didn’t do it in the most effective way sort of, just read through things that we’d done out of our books and that. I always find if I do questions, then that will help me a lot more rather than just reading things through and so I don’t think I went about it in the right way. I think we got all the opportunities and the right ways to do well but I don’t think I went about it in the right way personally cos (. . .) it didn’t interest me doing it and wanting to learn so much.”  
(Nigella, late Y9)

Olivia also claimed not to have revised but for her this was not because of the timing of the revision period but because she did not regard the tests as “important”.

Barry, Rachel, Una and William all vouched that in their various schools, and all three schools are represented, some of the tests were difficult because the work had not been covered in class and for this reason they found some of the tests more difficult.

For Kelly and Kevin, both of whom initially described the tests as quite hard, the difficulty was explained away by the ‘type’ of person one happens to be:

“... maths started easily and (...) got harder gradually (...) the start of it [had] really easy things like say adds and how many ice creams do you need (...) it’s just some of those questions really. Well it’s different for other pupils but (...) cos you know some things better and some people are cleverer than you and some people are, are not and they may be weaker than you at work.” (Kelly, late Y9)

“... Macbeth was the hardest (...) we had to understand cos it was like in a different language sort of thing and different spelling (...) I know some people did find it hard and some didn’t (...) the brainier people didn’t find it hard (...) like the brighter people ...” (Kevin, late Y9)

Recalling the work of psychologists interested in students’ notions of their intelligence and its effects on their motivation and achievement (Dweck, 1986, 2000; Covington, 1998) it is interesting to note the varied ways in which the young people theorise about their unease in exams. There are those that claim to withhold effort, apparently allowing their academic self-worth to remain intact. It is not that they are so much unable as unwilling, whereas for Kelly and Kevin expending effort may well be seen as futile for if they have no ‘natural’ ability, no amount of effort will reward them with the riches they are societally supposed to yearn for. Marie covered her potential sense of academic loss, not by effort but by error, stating that she had inadvertently taken the “wrong” level of test paper.

### *Level of test paper*

Levels of papers were mentioned by a number of Marie's peers, all from the rural school. Barry thought he had taken too easy an exam in English. He believes he would have been able to cope with the harder level. Keith thought he hadn't done very well on the maths exam as, because he is in the top set for maths, he had been made to take the level six to eight paper and this had been very hard for him to do. In science, although he is in the second set, he had been asked to take the level five to seven paper and found this "OK". Isaac also claimed not to have had problems with this paper but he had been given an extension paper for levels eight to nine and this he had found difficult as, he claimed, the focus of teaching had not been at the extension level.

### *Anxiety*

Olivia, who told us she did not revise because she did not think the Key Stage maths test to be important went on to tell more. Not only did she describe the test as "dreadful" but she then proclaimed:

"I'm not very good at . . . doing like subjects under like serious pressure cos it's like everyone's like in the room ( . . ) everyone has to be like a certain amount away from each other and no-one's allowed to speak to each other and stuff ( . . ) it's just like my God, quite scary."

Katy also described the exams as scary but turned the experience into something positive, believing it to be a good insight in examination practice in readiness for more major exams. Isla and Jenni spoke of the exams as being "nerve-wracking" while Matthew and Wendy, who was thankful she did not feel like crying during the tests, found them less so than they had feared. But Flo and Edmond were not so lucky:

"I don't really like being timed cos I lose concentration then, cos when the teacher says . . . 'You've got half an hour left or ten minutes', I usually, I panic

and start to do everything quick and on the last science test I missed a page because there wasn't enough time." (Flo, late Y9)

"It's been quite nervous at times sitting in a hall for sometimes two hours and not being able to talk and not being able to stand up or move about, and if you don't understand something you knew you'd lose a mark and it could affect you quite badly (. . .) because it's for our groups next, like whether we're in set one, set two and if you get a bad score you could always be in one of the bottom sets (. . .) cos you're with most of the people that don't behave so you want to be in that higher up sets." (Edmond, late Y9)

### *Practical Arrangements*

Several young people described aspects of the examination procedures. For Darren these descriptions were all he claimed to be able to remember.

### **Learning For Tests**

According to Fielding (1999a) there may be some evidence that teachers feel compelled to get students through tests rather than teaching in order to promote understanding. We have seen above that Isla, at least claims to feel under pressure from teachers to perform well in tests. A small number of interviews with teachers in the state sector schools involved in this research, show further signs that this may be so. I asked teachers to tell me about the effects they thought current education policy has on their teaching. While two art teachers named the National Curriculum as having the greatest effect on their teaching, all the other teachers, whether of core or foundation subjects spoke of SATs, teaching to the test, and the importance and pressure of examination results, both on pupils and teachers.



### *Teachers' Perspectives*

Teachers spoke of performance management and the pressure to achieve in terms of ensuring pupils fulfill the potential teachers judge them to have with reference to Key Stage 3 results, rather than of trying to meet individual pupil's needs. One teacher spoke of secondary schools being:

“... forced into becoming SATs factories ...” (Miss Davis, pastoral teacher, urban school)

This teacher predicts that an increasing amount of time will be used to prepare for national assessments, putting pupils under great stress. She believes less time will be given to developing:

“... well rounded individuals with their own thought processes and can speak their mind and stand up for themselves and debate and listen to other people and communicate (. . .) because the time has to go to getting the SATs because otherwise the government whips you as a school for not meeting the national average.” (Miss Davis, pastoral teacher, urban school)

This emphasis on performance at school level is thought, by one teacher, to have the potential for unintentional consequences:

“I think children are very well aware that schools have an inherent interest in creating, exam results and an ethos that, is good and I think children think that the school will bend over backwards to make sure they can achieve that and that their part, in reaching their potential, is less their responsibility, is more the schools. The school is the one that's anxious that exam results are this and that, not individual pupils. I think there's a, you know over the years as league tables have come on, have had more and more say, more power in the education system, I think it's taken away the responsibility of the child to maximise their potential, so I think therefore negative, or what can be negative attitudes to

learning, um 'Look doesn't matter what I do, the school will help me', I think that's a danger." (Mr Green, humanities teacher, urban school)

Other teachers question whether teaching to national tests might have another unforeseen consequence:

"The teaching style which I adopt at the moment may be effective in some pupils, it may work it may give reasonably good exam results at the end of the day but, I don't know perhaps I haven't kindled the interest in maths that I might be able to if I wasn't under pressure." (Mr Irving, maths teacher, rural school)

". . . it's very difficult getting the balance of having you know sparking their interest of something but and also covering the content. It's quite a slog . . . for the pupils really . . ." (Miss Collins, science teacher, rural school)

Miss Collins adds that "a lot of the fun and enjoyment of science" no longer exists.

Teachers then, describe the pressure they feel under, and while Mr Holmes, a teacher in a school which has been marked as having difficulties in reaching required government standards both in terms of examination results and OFSTED reports, went on to suggest that:

"It's interesting that I spoke to some of the [teachers], at this training we went to, and they said they, I think they're a reasonably well achieving school and they just don't bother with their SATs. They just don't focus on it at all. You know I don't know whether it's, I wonder if it's in every school or whether we just as a school we've kind of decided . . ." (Mr Holmes, science teacher, urban school)

The teachers interviewed at a "reasonably well achieving school" in this study, seem to suggest that they feel the pressure just as much as the teachers at less 'academic' educational establishments, to achieve examination results.

Although the teachers interviewed seem to accept that, with current government policy, there is an inevitability about their need to teach to the test, they are also conscious of the potential for other ‘hidden’ consequences of pursuing this particular educational pathway. As we have seen above, pupil anxiety may rise, pressure on teacher time may increase and focus on motivating young people to enjoy, as well as just do, a subject may be lost. Additionally teachers are concerned that, although the tests may be helpful to the most academically able, those who struggle may be at greatest risk from the system not meeting their needs. According to Mrs Dodd, pupils who are able to achieve least in English are being examined on skills that are high level and particularly difficult for them to access. Progression is lost and the comprehension questions:

“ . . . really throws a lot of kids, they don’t know how to respond . . . ” (Mrs Dodd, English teacher)

Teachers then, claim they teach to the test increasingly in Year 9, possibly to the detriment of a broader education for the students. But what lingers in the minds of pupils in terms of learning in the last year of Key Stage 3?

### **Section 3: Memories of Learning in Year 9**

At the start of the third round of interviews, the students were asked to tell me about what they had learned in Year 9. From this broad opening question, the discussion went on to explore why the young people thought they had been required to learn about the topics they mentioned. What the students talked about as a result of the first request, to tell me about learning generally, ranged across a number of topic areas including, English, maths and science, humanities, modern languages, PE and art. It also included comments about ability, dealing with people, independence and organisational skills. Eight students spoke of learning for tests, five of whom specifically mentioned SATs while two mentioned preparation for GCSE. Ten students, of the seventeen state school pupils questioned - plus one additional student on prompting - mentioned Macbeth, the text required for the Key Stage 3 tests in 2001. Further probing into why certain topics were being learned saw a

rise in the number of students talking about learning for testing to fifteen. While testing and the topics for testing were not the sole memories held by the students, they were certainly prevalent in the students' responses. But what exactly did the students say?

### *Student Stories of Learning for Testing*

#### **Briony**

Briony: In maths we've been doing a few like, new subjects. We've had a Key Stage 3 exam which we've just had

(...)

NA: Now you said you learned some subjects when you were doing Key Stage 3 exams (. . .) Did you learn some things do you think, because of the Key Stage 3 exams?

Briony: Oh yes, yeah

NA: What sorts of things did you learn about?

Briony: Pythagorus theorem and stuff like . . . kind of areas and finding the circumference of circles and . . . we've got some like new subjects we hadn't covered before . . .

NA: What's the point of learning about Pythagorus?

Briony: Um . . . cos it's used quite often to find the triangle, a right angle triangle so it's kind of . . . perhaps it'll be useful [laughs] I don't know . . .

NA: Can you think of a use for it?

Briony: Um if you're going to be a mathematician, but . . . yeah, but that doesn't really apply to me cos like you know I never will [laughs] (. . .) so I can't really think of a use for that apart from learning it for an exam

NA: And what about things like areas and circumferences, what's the point of that?

Briony: . . . Cos there could be a point to that if you had like a job kind of, like a maths job, something to do with maths or, you know but that

doesn't really . . . to me it isn't very useful cos I'm not going to, do anything . . .

NA: So why do you learn about them, if it's not going to be useful?

Briony: Because we have to [laughs] (. . .) Because, that's what we're taught in lessons, and they're going to be in exams so we have to learn about it if we want to do well . . .

Briony might justifiably be regarded as a 'normative instrumental' learner (Brown, 1987), at least she appears to accept and comply with the school culture in order to "do well". Unlike students in Brown's study, however, Briony is already a member of the middle class and attends a private school. While academically she might be described as 'average', within her school she has a low academic position. For her, education is a means of 'getting on' in her class. As we shall see in Chapter 11 Briony is perhaps less 'normative' and more 'alienated' than this short extract might have us believe, but she appears to regard the rules of schooling as something that must be complied with to gain the required qualifications to succeed. Subjects that have no obvious usefulness are categorised as necessary for progress beyond the school gates. But what of others who are not middle class or average academic ability?

### Kelly

Kelly attends the rural school and has not attained expected grades at Key Stage 2. She has a history of 'behavioural problems' at both primary and secondary school and has been excluded temporarily from Oak Park during Year 9. As we have seen in Chapter 6 the social capital available to Kelly through her family is low.

Kelly: I know I've learned a lot this year cos I've had my SATs . . . so they teach you quite well in Year 9 cos we have our SATs . . . but I can't remember what I've learned so . . .

NA: Right so you think that because you're taking SATs this year you've learned

- Kelly: A bit more yeah (. . .) cos they like go through all over from Year 8 and Year 7 and all that for your Year 9 SATs and . . . and they refer things and some things you can't remember and they go over it, they go over it so it's more better Year 9 and then the SAT cos they revise and everything in classes . . .
- NA: But you can't remember much about it?
- Kelly: No I can't remember . . .
- NA: What do you think the point of learning these things are, if there is a point in learning them?
- Kelly: To, for your GCSEs and get a job . . .
- NA: So what's the point of getting the GCSEs?
- Kelly: So they can see how well you've done in your school and you know, you've got low grades you can't go to a certain job. If you've got high grades you can . . .

Reading across the transcriptions of the interviews with Kelly along with supplementary notes from school records and casual observations, Kelly would best be described as alienated. Were she not female, she would neatly fit the image of 'one of the lads' (Brown, 1987; Willis, 1977). Her confrontation with the authority of school goes beyond:

" . . . girls' tactics of silence, unambiguous boredom and immersion in their own private concerns . . ." (McRobbie, 1991: p.48)

Yet for Kelly, as for Briony, no matter the differences in their socio-economic status, behaviours, aspirations and levels of conformity, learning in Year 9 is linked to the gaining of credentials: credentials that permit or deny entry to adult career pathways. Kelly, it transpires through the interviews, sees her preferred pathways as leading to a role of model or nurse, roles that mirror traditional concepts of a woman's place as object of desire and carer (Walkerdine, 1990). This alerts us to the notion that possible, permissible adult career pathways may be controlled by more than credentials. As McRobbie's work (1991) reminds us, the frames of reference being used by girls may vary significantly from those of boys.

## Matthew

Matthew: Like in lessons in science we've got SATs and so, concentrating on what we're going to do in SATs, like Macbeth in English (. . .) and in maths then we was just finding out how to do everything that's going to be on the SATs and same in science . . .

(. . .)

NA: What was the point of learning about Macbeth?

Matthew: Cos there, there was questions on it in our SATs and we had to know the play quite well . . . so we could answer the question in the test

NA: Right, is there any other reason you might want to know about it other than for the test?

Matthew: No don't think so

Matthew is not only positioned highly academically within the urban school he attends, at Key Stage 2 he also achieved above the expected levels for his age in the national tests. The social capital available to Matthew, like that of Kelly, appears to be low, but as we shall see in Chapter 10, he has aspirations to 'get out' of the working class (Brown, 1987), yet there are also suggestions from some teaching staff at least, that he may adhere more closely to the frames of reference adopted by Brown's 'ordinary kids' who wanted, back in the 1980s to 'get on' within their class, limiting his effort to the minimum required to achieve his aims.

## *Other Reasons for Learning*

### **Learning for Earning**

Twelve students thought some of the learning they spoke about was in preparation for future employment. While Barry (rural school, low SES, low ability) believes the only purpose for learning Macbeth was because it was a requirement of the Key Stage 3 exams, he says that the purpose of learning about angles in maths is:

“To help us in the future ( . . . ) if we get like jobs and stuff like that that use them, like builders and that ( . . . ) most jobs you need to know about maths . . .”

Isaac (rural school, high SES, high ability) was not sure why he learned about world wars in history, writing in detail in English or what the purpose of learning Latin was, but of German he saw a use in being able to converse with the people of Germany should he find himself visiting the country and the learning of periodic tables is needed:

“In case any time I was a chemist or a doctor, or something involving chemistry.”

### **Learning Skills**

Katy. Isaac and Nigella all mentioned language skills as being useful for foreign travel. For Katy the learning of speaking skills in German is:

“ . . . useful if you go there and you can actually speak rather than just being able to write it in a classroom situation . . .”

For Marie, learning skills in maths may be helpful for future employment but they may also prove useful in other subject areas:

“ . . . you use it a lot in science as well . . . maths is . . . maths is sort of you know . . . I find it . . . it’s hard to explain like, maths is everywhere in a way because everything has a mass or a volume or . . . a weight or it comes in sizes so it would help . . .”

### **Learning for Future Learning**

Isla, speaking in general terms about the purpose of learning links school education to future needs, both hers and future generations:



“[Learning is important] because you can maybe go to university or college because you’ve learned all the things during the years you’ve been at school and then you can get a decent job and then if you want to start a family again you can help your children . . .”

Sophie also links learning to possible future learning needs. I ask her what the point of learning about separation methods in chemistry is. She responds:

“I don’t know. I suppose if we went on, when we go on to do chemistry next year and then if we go on, like other years probably about experiments and things like that.”

### **Learning for Life**

Sophie also thinks some learning may be to help in life generally. Thus of history she says:

“Well like all the history going back and looking at people and how they worked and how they did it sort of thing so, applying it to life in general [laughs] (. . .) like going to war and things and what sort of methods work and what don’t.”

William likewise believes that the reason for learning subjects in school is because the knowledge may be useful in later life, though he goes on to mention also gaining qualifications in order to provide the young person with options for future career pathways, opening up opportunities so the individual is able to:

“. . . do what you want, so that you can get a job which you would like . . .”

William then brings us back to the notion of learning for the test, to gain credentials, to gain employment opportunities. Not all students saw a purpose to learning, at least certain aspects of the curriculum. Either they could not give a reason for needing to know a

particular area of learning or they could see no point in learning the specific subject or topic.

### **Pointless Learning?**

Fifteen students out of the twenty-three interviewed, were unsure of why they were asked to learn certain aspects of the curriculum although some went on to give a reason. For instance Darren claimed he did not know why he needed to learn about Macbeth but ultimately went on to say it was because it was needed for Key Stage 3 tests. William suggested I ask a theology teacher the purpose of learning about theology as he believes most people do not know why they must learn this, but he then added, of learning about Islam:

“I think when we do stuff like that we do it to . . . get a wider . . . variety of knowledge on other religions . . .”

Marie, of the purpose of learning classics states:

“I don’t know. I’ve never actually thought about it. I carried on doing it because we had a choice, cos I really enjoyed it . . . I’m not sure [laughs] about that.”

Kevin could not give a reason for needing to learn about Hitler and Keith, although explaining that the point of learning about the second world war was that:

“[It] taught us . . . how this country got free. If Germany won it would have probably been a different place and what happened back then, what’s, how things are different now than back in the second world war. . .”

could see no necessity for learning this. Nor could he see any point in learning algebra although here he conceded that for certain jobs it may

“. . . help you solve a problem.”

Olivia sees little point in continuing with Latin lessons as she is not going to continue the subject in Key Stage 4. Nor does she see much point in learning about metamorphic rocks in chemistry unless one is aspiring to a career where such information is useful. She goes on:

“But it’s interesting as well, I mean, yeah it is. If I decide to be a geologist or whatever, then that will be useful, but otherwise it’s just a bit pointless but still fun cos they have to think of something we have to do in the lessons [laughs].”

I query this last remark and she responds:

“Well they always set us like what they want us to do . . .”

### **Summary**

Although there are hints that students think that the purpose of learning goes beyond testing and the gaining of credentials in some contexts, there is nevertheless a strong pull towards education being regarded as a means of being judged and graded, opening up or closing down certain vocational pathways in the future. This trend goes across gender, socio-economic status and ability level. While some students, such as Olivia talk of the fun of learning, the point of learning topics is not, on the whole, about learning for its own sake, but learning for tests which will help to determine futures. Learning appears to be about jumping through hoops placed in front of young people by adults, and in the main, these hoops are accepted by the young people, although their reactions to them may, and do differ.

This notion of learning as jumping through hoops and learning, or at least teaching, for testing, comes all the more to the fore when we examine the responses given by the pupils to the question what did you do in each of the core National Curriculum subjects immediately before the Key Stage 3 exams.

### *Preparing for Testing*

Students in the state schools were asked what they had been learning about in English, maths and science immediately before the tests while students at the private school were asked about learning in maths prior to the national tests. All seventeen state school pupils spoke of learning about Macbeth in English, eight also mentioning grammar and letter writing and four of taking practice papers. In maths seventeen out of twenty-three pupils said there had been revision for the tests although one pupil from the private school claimed all revision for the Key Stage maths test had been done out of school. Eleven students said they had been working through old test papers. A small number of pupils claimed there had been new topics introduced for the sole purpose of the tests. Seventeen students sat Key Stage 3 science tests. Of these seven talked about revision being undertaken in class; eight mentioned practising by working through old test papers and three spoke of covering topics especially for the test.

The youngsters were asked what the purpose of learning was in English, maths and science immediately before the tests. Not surprisingly twenty-two of the twenty-three students answered that the purpose was the tests themselves although a very small number of other reasons were also given. These included one student who believed the purpose of learning about Macbeth was both because it was important, though the reason for its importance was not communicated, and because it increased her confidence through knowing more about the play than her mother; one girl who thought learning about Macbeth might be of relevance to young people wishing to enter certain professions; and a boy who thought learning about grammar would be generally useful. Two students were not sure about the purpose of learning about Macbeth.

That the children have etched in their memories work leading up to national Key Stage tests is not in doubt. The sense some students make of the work they have been requested to do may be more uncertain. Kelly told me that learning about Macbeth was quite important; I asked her why:

**“I don’t know it was just an old story made up (. . .) cos Shakespeare wrote it . . .  
and it’s good for English because it can help because they’ve got more things to  
test you on.”**

## Chapter 10: Talents, Options and Aspirations

### Introduction

“A well balanced 14-19 phase of learning is crucial if we are to achieve our objective of well-motivated young people playing their full part in society and in the economy . . . For too many young people, it has been a period of falling engagement in education and rising disaffection.” (DfES, 2001a: p30)

While policy makers acknowledge the failure of the use of vocational education in the past to motivate those young people struggling to engage in education, current policy makers answer to the assumed problem of disengagement and disaffection is to attempt to improve the status of vocational education and to offer a range of pathways to young people to meet “individual talents and aspirations at 14-19” (DfES, 2001a: p.16) as well as continuing to maintain a focus on ‘basic skills’. A number of assumptions appear to exist here. Firstly, it is assumed that decreases in motivation are likely to be caused by curriculum content and that by moving away from the ‘academic’ to the ‘vocational’ young people will wish to act in desired ways. That is, they will achieve “good school-leaving qualifications” (DfES, 2001a: p. 30); remain in education beyond compulsory education; and an increasing number of young people, especially from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, will proceed with their education to university. Secondly, it is supposed that students will make rational choices about their options that will “allow students to pursue their talents and aspirations” (DfES, 2001g). Thirdly it seems to be taken for granted that given the rational choice and the increased motivation, this will result in “the well-qualified workforce we need in this century”, with the requisite skills for a buoyant economy.

In Chapter 8 we saw how Wendy had the aspiration of becoming an artist and hoped to go to art college after compulsory education. However, believing that she required qualifications in maths to attain a place at college, and believing herself unable to succeed in mathematics, we saw the emergence of “learned helplessness” (Dweck, 1986, 2000). Although Wendy claimed that additional effort in subjects could improve performance,

and therefore might reasonably make just such an extra effort to succeed in order to achieve her goal, she in fact, chose what appears to be the ‘irrational’ solution and tends to disengage from studying the subject of mathematics. Apparently stigmatised by her perceived failings, she tells us that:

“I just don’t understand [maths] so there’s been some occasions actually I’m just, tired of it and all about.”

Wendy believes in her talent as an artist, she elects to study art at Key Stage 4 yet she senses a futility in dreaming of progressing to a job she claims she would love to gain. She wants to move beyond the confines of her father’s experiences of employment, to carve out a career that will provide her with enjoyment as well as financial security yet she sees herself shackled by her own inability.

Proponents of current education policy may argue that students like Wendy who have difficulty in gaining success in a particular field of study, now being fed a diet of numeracy throughout their early years at school will gain the necessary skills not to find themselves in the position Wendy places herself or is placed. Yet this assumes that Wendy’s difficulties can all be linked to past approaches to the teaching of numeracy, for although not in name, certainly in content, Wendy has been following National Curriculum guidelines for mathematics, which incorporates numeracy learning, throughout her educational years. She has had additional support in the classroom and she has, she says, used revision books at home supported by her mother, but apparently with little outward signs of sufficient progress to prevent Wendy from labelling herself “thick” and “rubbish” and her teachers labelling her “lazy”. For Wendy, while she has opted to continue to study an area of interest, enjoyment and perceived talent she also regards herself as bound by the structures that emphasise her lack of talent in another area, which itself may be a social construction, and by socially constructed rules that she believes will hinder her progress along her chosen career pathway. For Wendy a disjuncture between talents, options and aspirations is perceived as likely to occur; she may not be alone in this.

In this chapter students' beliefs about their talents in relation to their preferred and actual option choices and their aspirations are explored. These will be considered with reference to the apparent rationale of policy makers in that students will be motivated by the vocational, will make rational choices to meet their talents and aspirations and that by so doing the nation will obtain the requisite numbers of students educated to meet the needs of industry.

### **Earning as a motivator to learning**

We have seen in Chapter 7 that all the young people in the study regarded learning as a means to earning whether or not this was thought to be important in their lives in their second year of secondary school. In Chapter 8 however, it became apparent that although learning was recognised as necessary in order to obtain employment this notion alone was not regarded as motivational to the young people. Only five students answered the question 'What switches you on to want to learn?' directly with a response alluding to employment or earnings. Four of the five students were males; three of the boys and the girl are from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Academically the five students are positioned across the measured ability ranges; three of the students attend the urban school, the remaining two students being pupils at the rural school. Three of the four boys all gave education as an important feature of their lives and all said this was at least partially because of the role it played in gaining employment. The fourth boy also gave employment as a reason for learning being important but did so only having been prompted to talk about the importance of learning. It may not, then be surprising that these four say they are motivated to learn by the thought of getting a good job, money and luxuries. In the case of the fifth respondent naming the thought of jobs as a motivating factor, she had categorised learning as not as important as her family believing the purpose of learning to be in order to gain employment and to support her family. However, there are a further fourteen young people who said learning was important, to an extent because of its requirement in the job market, who do not list the thought of a job as a motivator to learning. Learning may be viewed as important for their future careers but perhaps not sufficiently so to make them want to learn.



The young people in this study, in their second year of secondary school have a notion that learning and earning are somehow connected but this does not appear to necessarily result in them regarding learning as important in their lives, still less to motivate them to want to learn. At this stage of their learning careers, they are making tentative links between education and their economic futures but the connections being made seem as yet, ill formed and partial.

Part of the explanation for this may lie in students seeing things in short-term rather than long-term goals for which, even in Year 9 there may be little evidence of existence of such goals in the minds of the students (Wallace et al, 1998). Although the students were not specifically asked about their long-term goals in the first round of interviews in the present study, nevertheless in some cases it has been possible to piece together an overview of the young people's aspirations for their futures. Additionally information was gathered in the subsequent two interviews, early in and at the end of Year 9 that help to build a picture of what may have been in the minds of the young people in terms of their futures. It is to an analysis of this data that I now turn.

### **Young Futures: Year 8**

The future aspirations of the young people when they were in Year 8 falls into three broad categories: educational aspirations, employment aspirations and intrinsic aspirations. Additionally two young people hoped to travel the world and three teenagers spoke of creating opportunities, ability and being challenged respectively.

#### *Educational aspirations*

Nineteen students in the sample provided information during the first interview that told of their educational aspirations for the future. Of these, thirteen students mentioned going to university ten of whom saw it as a hope or a foregone conclusion and three who were unsure of their commitment but did not rule out the possibility of entering higher

education. A further five of the nineteen students considered further education at age sixteen, at college, a possibility. One girl definitely wished to leave formal education at the earliest possible opportunity. Table 10.1 shows details of the social make-up of the children by educational aspiration. Although there appears to be similar numbers aspiring to higher education across the socio-economic backgrounds of the students, the samples from each school were originally composed of equal numbers of high, medium and low achieving children in terms of academic measurement. Had the children been selected differently a different picture may have emerged. More interestingly a closer examination of the discourse used by the children reveals that of the five middle class children from the rural school and the four children from private education aspiring to university, five said they were definitely or probably going to university, two said they wanted to and two thought they may go to university. Of the four urban students looking toward a university education two said they hoped to be able to, one would like to go and one saw it as a possibility but had only moderate commitment.

'Social group'	Compulsory Only	College	University	Unknown	Number in sample
Urban		4	4	1	9
Rural lower	1	1			2
Rural upper			5	2	7
Private			4	2	6

**Table 10.1: Educational aspirations by 'social group' in Year 8.**

This may be little more than chance terminology, yet it may also alert us to the possibility that aspirations may vary in strength of commitment and perception of certainty.

### *Employment aspirations*

Twenty-two of the twenty-four children provided information about their hopes and dreams for their future careers. Some named very clear career options such as pilot, journalist, author or policeman. Others identified careers they dreamed of but also recognised the remoteness of the possibility of achieving careers such as ballerina,

footballer or Formula One driver. Some were vaguer about their career pathway talking of a job in IT, in drama or fashion, working in an office or working in a factory on computers. One spoke only of wanting an average job within a span of difficulty while another said simply that she wanted money. Several noted the fluidity of their thoughts, at one time wanting to be an archaeologist, at another an author.

Only one student overtly linked his hope of university to his career aspirations, to give a 'head start' to becoming a journalist. One student, whose employment aspiration was named as policeman, although not aspiring to a place at university, did link learning at college to his choice of future employment:

"I wanna go into like college and learn about the law and everything so I can be a policeman." (Kevin, Year 8)

Rachel, while unsure of her future aspirations both in terms of education and employment, saw a decision to go to university as being based on the career she eventually chooses thus:

"Depends on what job I do, may go on to university."

For other students the links between educational aspirations and employment aspirations appear to be more tenuous. While six of the thirteen students aspiring to university had quite firm ideas about the career or career area they hoped to follow, four spoke of a variety of possibilities and were aware that they were only trying out possibilities in their minds rather than being committed to a particular pathway. Three students aspired to university with no idea about what they ultimately hoped to achieve in terms of employment.

Two of the students who aspired to continue formal education beyond compulsory education but who did not consider the possibility of university, gave no hoped for career while the other three students who claimed they hoped to continue in further education beyond the age of 16 all had some idea about their desired futures in terms of the world of

work. Kelly alone claimed no allegiance to formal education beyond that which is compulsory. For her, with her dream of becoming a model, there is no reason for continuing to learn further:

NA: After you leave school do you think you'll do any learning?

(. . .)

Kelly: I don't think so cos if I've been here so many years I would know what things are and I wouldn't need to do it and if I do get the job I want I'll be (. . .) it's be boring stuck in school . . .

### *Intrinsic aspirations*

Eleven of the twenty-four young people mentioned a desire to be happy or enjoy their futures. All six of the privately educated children saw this as one of their aims while three children from the rural school – two middle class and one working class – and two children from the urban school also spoke of their intrinsic aspirations.

## **The unfolding story of aspirations through Year 9**

### *Early Year 9*

The second interview did not specifically explore the young people's aspirations for their futures. However a small number of respondents did comment on career hopes. Some were re-affirmations of their thoughts in Year 8; some were changes in notions, providing us with a reminder of both continuity and change that can be a part of evolving aspirations. The young people were questioned about the option choices they would make if they were completely free to learn about topics of their own choosing during the course of Key Stage 4. What came to light from this was that thirteen of the twenty-four youngsters said that at least some of the subjects they selected were to help them with their careers. The other major reason given for selection – eighteen out of twenty-four – of at least some of the subjects was because the teenagers liked these subjects. But it is to those choices made in

the name of employment, and the students who made such a choice, that I turn to take a closer look.

### **Imagined Options for Career Aspirations**

Students were asked what they would choose to learn about during Key Stage 4 if they were able to have a 'free' choice of subjects. The students who selected subjects because they believed them to be necessary for their future careers, when given the opportunity to envisage a completely free selection procedure unhindered by National Curriculum requirements and timetabling limitations, were skewed toward higher socio-economic status and academic ability and ten of the students were female. This is particularly interesting given that it was noted above that those students who espoused motivational significance of employability for learning tended to be male and of lower socio-economic status. Yet when these students were freed of the structures imposed by others their selection of subjects they claimed they would like to learn more about were not directly linked to employment. Intrinsic reward and perceived ability were listed as reasons for selection, although Wendy also made her choices with reference to her relationships with the teachers and Kevin selected English because:

“You’d have to do really wouldn’t you cos you get thick if you ain’t got English (. . .) stupid in the head. You wouldn’t be able to spell and all that . . .” (Kevin, early Year 9)

How 'free' the students' imagination was when considering the question and giving their answers is not clear; the thirteen students making at least some selections to meet the perceived requirements of employers remained bound by the social structures of economism. Other students may have had in mind a less constricting world or may not understand so well the rules by which the game is played. Those students making option choices because the subject might be needed in order to acquire a job did not necessarily limit their selections to vocationally desirable subjects; for some their selections included subjects they would like to learn about for their own intrinsic rewards, but they balanced

these with socially derived requisites. Thus, for example, Sophie would have liked to have learned more about horses and sport because she is interested in knowing more about these whereas she selected English, maths, geography and a foreign language:

“I suppose because they’d be useful ( . . . ) for after school, you know when you’ve got a job and you’d have to be able to communicate with other people and things like that.” (Sophie, early Year 9)

Olivia wanted to learn about art, textiles, architecture, singing and drama because she likes those topics, although art, textiles and architecture also encapsulate some of her thoughts about possible future careers. On the other hand, she selected maths and science not for their intrinsic reward but because:

“ . . . most of the subjects will help you in later life ( . . . ) like science, but I don’t like science, it might help in like . . . I don’t know. It’s just a good subject cos it might help you if you . . . cos some jobs you need to have like things that you like and things that you don’t like ( . . . ) I don’t know, it depends what you wanted to be. You don’t know what you you want to be at our age and you don’t really know until you’ve done your GCSEs . . . and I have no idea what I would take up cos I might want to be, I’ll probably want to be like something to do with art or something. I’d like to be an architect, I guess, interior designer and I don’t really need . . . maths I would take but I don’t need maths for an interior designer but I would if I wanted to be an architect ( . . . ) I would [take maths] cos then I would have like a choice when I get older.” (Olivia, early Year 9)

While those students selecting options for employability from higher socio-economic groups spoke both of extrinsic necessity and intrinsic reward, those from less privileged backgrounds tended much more to emphasise the vocational rationale for their option selections.

Tracy spoke of opting to learn about maths, science and English in order to gain a “good job”; computer skills because most employment now includes using computers; and geography and history partly because they are “nice to know” but also because they:

“... might help. I mean in some jobs it would be irrelevant but you’d always have it so they’d know what things you’re good at for different aspects of the job.” (Tracy, early Year 9)

Edmond selected Business Studies as it would be useful for employment and PE and music both for their intrinsic reward and for potential employment opportunities.

Matthew gave a range of vocational and practical reasons for his selection, speaking of intrinsic reward only with regard to English, and even here, this was tempered with the perceived requirement of English for employment. Rachel likewise justified her option choices with reference to career, adding that she quite likes English as well. She also suggested that her choices would be more extensive to meet her career needs but that at this stage in her school career she had yet to determine her future employment pathway. Kelly made no specific subject selections saying only of subjects in general that they are needed:

“... to help you in tests and GCSEs and stuff cos you need to learn those subjects to get through don’t you (. . .) to get a job.” (Kelly, early Year 9)

What subjects do the students claim are required for employment?

Of the thirteen students who claimed they would want to learn particular subjects because of their usefulness in gaining employment, eight named core National Curriculum subjects - English, maths and science - although not all eight named all three subjects. Maths was the most frequently named subject being selected because it was necessary for employment, seven of the eight students speaking thus. Five of the eight students selected English for the same reason and four of the eight students selected science. Six of the thirteen students named one or more National Curriculum foundation subject as an option

choice made with employment opportunities in mind. Thus three of the six students named foreign languages; two named IT skills; and one chose sport, linking this to his dream of being employed ultimately in the field of sport. Business studies, humanities, social studies and music were the other subjects selected with the rationale that they may aid future employment chances.

In all thirteen out of twenty-four students have given employment as a reason for selecting at least one subject in their imagined option choices. Over six months earlier all twenty-four students spoke of learning being necessary or important for jobs. When asked to imagine 'freedom' from any constraints to select to learn about what they wanted to know slightly over half the students remained enmeshed in the role of education for employment purposes.

It is important to note at this point that other students, beyond the thirteen who overtly mentioned careers as a reason for opting to include a particular subject, also elected some of these subjects but that their vocalised rationale was unrelated to employment, and was more likely to be because they claimed to enjoy the subject. For some of these students it may be that they not only liked learning the subject but also ultimately hoped to pursue a career that would reflect this preference, yet during the interview did not specifically articulate this connection. Similarly, one student chose to omit a subject from the timetable when questioned at interview about their ideal Key Stage 4 learning programme, but went on to explain that in reality they would not do this because of the need to learn about the subject for future employment. Thus we find Nigella, who is not one of the above group of thirteen students stating, when asked if she would 'bin' any of the subjects she was currently (in Year 9) studying at school:

"Quite a few things . . . I feel . . . in things like maths I don't well I don't hate it as much as I used to but I . . . although I wouldn't want to do it so much I know . . . I think it's very useful to have, to be able to do it and so I'd probably try and do it because I think it's quite useful to do although I wouldn't want it personally to do so much if I didn't have to but I think it's quite useful to have" (Nigella, early Y9)



Asked why maths is useful, Nigella continued:

“I just think you need it for most jobs and things and you use it all the time if you’re going shopping . . . “ (Nigella, early Y9)

Nigella is also one of five students who, while not overtly specifying links between imagined option choices and future employment aspirations, nevertheless, when taking transcripts as a whole infers a link between preferred courses of study at Key Stage 4 and career pathways. For Nigella this means selecting drama and theatre studies as part of her Key Stage 4 timetable while she harbours a hope of possibly becoming an actress. Jenni would like to learn more about art and one of her thoughts about future careers is to follow in her father’s footsteps and become an art teacher. Flo likewise would both like to learn about and earn from art. These students increase the skew towards high socio-economic females, but some redress is made by Vince who wants to study PE and has a dream about becoming a footballer or Formula One Racing Driver and Darren who likes learning about computers and aspires to working in a factory using his computer skills.

Keith’s response to why he selected particular subjects was to consider the likelihood of gaining credentials:

“Because I think I’m quite good at them that’s why I think I’d do quite well in them at GCSE.” (Keith, early Year 9)

On the other hand he would eliminate Design and Technology because he doesn’t “find them that important” by which he means the subject is not required for most jobs. Thus while Keith does not immediately appear to link education and employment, through the desire to gather credentials that can be traded for jobs, the connection is made implicitly.

### *Late Year 9*

The third round of interviews took place at the end of Key Stage 3 after the students had selected their options for Key Stage 4. By this time students knew the limitations of the options imposed through National Curriculum requirements and school structural considerations. Although young people have some choice in the foundation subjects they study, the majority of students in state schools have to select at least one humanities subject along with a modern foreign language and a subject from a range within the discipline of technology. Additionally they must also select a small number of other 'optional' subjects and it is these and the reasons given for selection that form the basis of the analysis that follows. The number of students questioned at this time was twenty-three, one student from the urban school having transferred to another educational establishment.

#### **Selecting Futures: Optional Learning at Key Stage 4**

By far the most frequent reason given for selecting subjects from the optional range on offer to the youngsters across all three schools was interest and enjoyment, twenty-two of the twenty-three students citing this as a factor for the selection of at least one of their option choices. Employment was given as a reason by fourteen of the twenty-three adolescents although one of these said he believed that his selections had been made more on the grounds of enjoyment than for career reasons and one youngster said that having made a particular choice because of a particular career interest at the time of the selection process, she no longer sought a career in the particular field. Additionally two students spoke of the selection as being in part due to consideration of the future usefulness of the subject, one of the two specifying this both in terms of university entrance and later life. Eleven students mentioned perceived ability as a factor in the decision-making process, one of these talking of the potentiality of gaining a higher grade at GCSE. Another student made his selection for a GNVQ IT qualification on the grounds that, if successful, this would give him four GCSEs.

Although only about 60% of the sample of students in this study specifically named employment as a factor for deciding on the options to take others may, by reference to qualification requirements, infer a link between options and future earning. By including students who spoke of 'ability', 'future use' or 'worth of qualification' the number of students linking options to futures rises to twenty out of twenty-three. What the links are between options and earning, in the minds' of the young people is an interesting aspect to explore. Do they see the subjects as a useful means of gathering requisite knowledge and skills for their future aspirations or merely as credentials to be traded for jobs?

### **Credentials or Know How?**

During the third interview students were asked about their medium and long-term aspirations. Specifically they were asked what they hoped to achieve by the end of compulsory schooling; what their plans were for immediately after compulsory education; and what, if any, were their long-term dreams. By cross-referencing their responses to these questions with their option choices light may be shed on possible connections between schooling and employment.

Nine students who explicitly linked at least one of their option choices with their future employment appear to have made subject selections that may provide them with not only a qualification but also knowledge and skills that relate to their career aspirations. Two further students have made choices that reflect their potential employment dreams but did not talk about the link between employment and school learning overtly. Ten young people mentioned ability as a reason for their decisions on options and this may suggest that they seek to learn about the subjects that they believe themselves competent to gain credentials in, possibly in order to make themselves more marketable. One student, as we have already seen, selected a subject because it appeared to offer a simple route to a greater number of qualifications. Two students wanted to gain sufficient qualifications to take them into successful futures, for one that being A-levels and university and for the other a 'good job'.

In the sample of students studied there seems to be a range of beliefs about the linkages between learning and earning. For around half of the students it would seem that they hope to gain some knowledge and skills to help them directly with their future careers. Slightly more than half seem to see learning to be, at least in part, about gaining qualifications, in whatever subjects in order to follow their chosen pathways. Yet when we look at the young people's aims for Key Stage 4 another possible picture presents itself.

### **Selecting Futures: The end of compulsory schooling**

Students were asked what they hoped to achieve by the end of Key Stage 4. Twenty-one of the twenty-three students said they wanted to have achieved good results although their perceptions of what this might actually mean seemed to vary. Some wanted enough to keep particular options open to them later in their careers, others sought specific grades while others knew only that they wanted good marks but knew too little of the examination process to know what the notion of 'good marks' might translate into.

Seven students wanted to achieve sufficiently good grades to ensure the possibility of gaining employment or a place at university. The seven students included both males and females and ranged across socio-economic groups, school and academic ability. The meaning of 'good grade' however seemed to vary dependent on their various positions as did their ideas on their future aspirations. Thus Nigella (high SES, average prior achievement, private school) wanted to gain enough good grades to ensure a good job while also having enjoyed the process of learning and Isaac (high SES, high prior achievement, rural school) wanted enough good grades to be able to take A-levels and eventually go to university. Olivia, an academically able student from the private school sought A\*, A and B grade GCSEs to ensure success by which she meant a well-paid job; Rachel, an average student from the urban school wanted to achieve C's or above for her career and Flo (lower prior achievement, higher socio-economic status, rural school) wants good grades because she wants a good job. Matthew, an academically able student at the

urban school would like to achieve 5 A - C grades “for decent jobs”. A query as to what he meant by this elicited:

“For like policeman or something you didn’t need any . . . for . . . a good job you needed five . . .” (Matthew, late Year 9)

Kevin (lower prior achievement, urban school) would like to gain enough grades to obtain a good job, though he knows insufficient about the grading system to be able to specify what a ‘good grade’ means to him. He wants to be a policeman.

Nigella, Isaac and Olivia all want to proceed to university as does Matthew, although he would prefer to be a footballer. Rachel might consider university but definitely wants to go to college as does Flo while Kevin, at the behest of his family mentions the possibility of enlisting in the armed forces prior to attempting to join the police force.

Twelve students from across the range of gender, socio-economic status and academic prior achievement provide hoped for grades without reference to their link to futures beyond compulsory education. Edmond and Vince, from the urban school and of average/high ‘ability’ seek grades “C or above”, in similar vein to Katy, Marie and Keith, the first two of whom hope for As but want nothing lower than a C, the latter being happy with A\*, A or B and not wishing to gain below a C. These three students of the rural school are of average or higher ‘ability’ and of high socio-economic status. Isla, whose social positioning is likewise, and who is of average prior achievement would be disappointed with a grade C and hopes for B grades. Briony, Felicity and William, all from the private school and of average or higher ‘ability’ seek A\* to B grades, while Una and Darren, both low ‘ability’ students from the urban school also seek A and B grades. Kelly (low ‘ability’, low SES, rural school) likewise, though she adds:

“I won’t get A\*s and that. It’s just me dreaming (. . .) cos I’m not that good.”  
(Kelly, late Year 9)

Barry and Wendy (lower 'ability' and socio-economic status) want good marks, the former in English and maths, the latter more generally, but like Kevin do not know enough about the examination labelling system to specify what this might mean in terms of grades.

Additionally two students also wanted to gain in confidence over the ensuing two years, two wanted to enjoy learning, one wanted to enjoy friendships, three spoke of wanting to have worked hard enough, one wanted to obtain a good report from school, one wanted to have gained a spread of knowledge while one wanted to have discovered the areas she enjoyed most in order to assist her decision-making for future learning beyond compulsory education. Nevertheless, the overriding priority in the minds of the young people in this study was to gain good qualifications. What the perceived value of these qualifications were to some of the students is not possible to ascertain from the data available but for some, at least, the value may lie in the usefulness of qualifications as currency to be exchanged in order to realise hoped for futures. They have received the message that learning is about credentials.

The hopes for the future of the students at the end of Year 9 have been organised into the same categories as those in Year 8, that is educational, employment and intrinsic aspirations. Again a number of students listed other aspirations, which were: two students yearning for fame; four hoping to travel; one seeking to 'make the world a better place'; and one wanting to be 'successful'.

#### *Selecting Futures: Educational aspirations*

The students were asked what they hoped to do immediately after they completed their compulsory education. Three students did not provide information on this, the results of the remaining twenty students are given in Table 10.2, below.

**Table 10.2: Educational aspirations by 'social group' in Year 9.**

School Type	Not known	Work/Training	VI <sup>th</sup> form/ college	HE
Private (n.6)	1		5	5
Rural (n.9)	1		8	4
Urban (n.8)	2		6	2

The raw data hide some additional possibilities. The unknown aspiration of the privately educated student may be inferred from other aspects of the interview to be continuation in formal education to university; the rural school unknown implies a desire to leave formal education as soon as possible; two of the eight students hoping to continue into the sixth form at the rural school have previously shown an interest in university education, but did not explicitly state this on this occasion; one of the urban 'unknowns' suggests leaving schooling at age sixteen; the second urban 'unknown' may be inclined to go to college; both of the two potential higher education hopefuls from the urban school would prefer to leave education before this if a suitable job opportunity arose; additionally, one further student at the urban school may still have an interest in higher education but this is not clear from the third interview data.

#### *Selecting Futures: Employment aspirations*

The final question about aspirations asked during the third round of interviewing, required the students to reflect on their dreams for the future. Four students did not have an idea about their futures or did not relay their dream in the interview. The remaining nineteen respondents all gave either specific job titles, areas of work or more generally a dream to be in employment. Three students mentioned good pay as a hope while one spoke of not wishing to become rich. As in the first round of interviews some mentioned career dreams that they then spoke of as being unlikely, others seemed to see their aspirations as realistic possibilities. Comparing the aspirations of each student at the end of Year 9 with those they had spoken of midway through Year 8 it transpires that 10 students have retained their dreams across the 14 –15 month time span while 6 have had apparent changes in their

aspirations. Two of these six students, however have voiced some interest in the area of their new career aspirations, thus one girl who had dreamt of becoming a model later decreed a desire to become a nurse, but in the earlier interview she had named nursing as a good job to have; a boy now keen to become a musician where once his interests had been in sport and sports journalism, already had considered the possibility of using his skills in music, gained through private piano lessons in an earlier interview. Another two students out of the six spoke of vague possibilities for careers that were currently in their minds, again reminding us of the fickle nature of career aspirations of some adolescents.

### *Selecting Futures: Intrinsic aspirations*

The number of students mentioning intrinsic aspirations had fallen from eleven just over a year earlier to five by the end of Year 9. This appears to be in line with research that shows pupils in Year 7 - 9 tending to make sense of their learning for themselves and on their terms whereas by Year 10 and 11 the students begin to take on board adult views about the meaning and purpose of learning: that it revolves around the gaining of grades for career prospects (Rudduck et al, 1996).

### **Learning and Earning: Links in Mind**

The young students in this study clearly are aware that links are made between school learning and employment although the precise nature of such links in the minds of the teenagers are less easy to determine. However, it can be seen that for some students, at least, school learning is a means of obtaining skills and knowledge they believe will prove useful to them in their chosen careers. For others it is the need to acquire credentials for employment, not necessarily related to one's own field of career interest, that attaches schooling to earning. A large proportion - twenty-one out of twenty-three - youngsters in the study certainly seem to place great importance on the acquisition of good results setting this as their aim for the next two years of their school life. Only Sophie and Jenni do not articulate such an aim, but rather state:



“I’d hope to have a better understanding of what I’ve enjoyed and what I’ve learned from the year and to be able to see what I’d like to carry on with after my GCSEs . . .” (Sophie, late Y9; higher ability and socio-economic status; private school)

“I don’t know just . . . to stay with the group of friends and just work extremely hard but to stay with my friends . . . and just to enjoy the way my life is going . . . I haven’t really got any big plans or anything [laughs] (. . .) but just to enjoy myself.” (Jenni, late Y9: average ability; higher socio-economic status; rural school)

But we see also that, although the majority of the young people want to achieve ‘good’ results in their GCSEs, their definitions of ‘good’ vary considerably. To an extent these definitions seem to be socio-economically linked yet it is interesting to note Kelly’s “dreams” and those of Darren and Una, who mention A and B grades yet, taking the available evidence of their academic achievements to date, seem unlikely candidates for such rewards. These students appear to know the value placed by the broader society in which they exist, on the level of grade awarded. Others with apparently less knowledge of the terminology, can regurgitate the message that grades determine job chances and are therefore of importance to their futures. But how does their knowledge of the need for credentials link to their aspirations and their perceived talents?

### **Linking talents, options and aspirations**

Wendy believes herself to be talented in art, she opts for art and she hopes to go to art college with a long-term aim of becoming an artist. Her talents, options and employment aspirations fall in line, just as policy makers seem to envisage. However as we saw in Chapter 8, Wendy is regarded by at least some of her teachers as lazy and switched off. Having a particular career pathway in mind does not guarantee, for Wendy, motivation to learn in all contexts. But what of the others in the Class of 23?

During the first two interviews linked pathways from talents through options to employment aspirations could be drawn for twelve students from across the range of gender, socio-economic status and academic ability level. For Nigella, Flo, Edmond, and Vince, these early links continued through to their actual option choices, made later in Year 9, prior to the third and final interview taking place. Matthew also continued a particular pathway but this involved maths, a compulsory subject at Key Stage 4, rather than an option choice. What strikes most when looking at the changes from earlier interviews to the interview taking place at the end of Year 9 is the shift from a broad gender, socio-economic and academic mix of students making links between their perceived talents, the subjects to be studied and their hoped for occupational roles. In the later interview, at the end of Year 9, the group having very clear links between talents, optional and occupational aspirations consist predominantly of lower socio-economic status. Apart from Nigella and Flo, gone are the young people from the private school and middle class students from the rural school who had previously linked their talents to options and employment aspirations. Middle class students, late in Year 9, bounded by the option choices available to them have now chosen a mix of creative studies and humanities, thus the choices include art, design and technology, drama, media studies, geography and history while William selects triple science in his repertoire. Though not connected to a specific career, for most of these students their aspiration is to continue in formal education through university, leaving decisions about their ultimate vocations until they are older. The young people whose occupational aspirations mirror their option choices and their perceived talents at the end of Year 9 are more likely to attend the urban school and have lower socio-economic status, although in terms of measured academic ability they are a mixed group. This does not mean that middle class pupils no longer see a clear link between perceived abilities, options and aspirations. Rather they see the gaining of a university place as paramount in their journey toward an, as yet, unclear occupational goal. What they appear to be particularly clear about is their 'class' aspiration. This is to maintain their privileged position and the 'rules of the game' require them to acquire institutionalised cultural capital in order to achieve this goal.

Flo, like Wendy, seeks to continue to improve her talent as an artist and hopes ultimately to attend art college and then find a career in fashion or interior design. We have seen in Chapter 6 how Flo's middle class status may help her have a different attitude toward this aspiration than her counterpart from the urban school. Nigella does not deviate from her love of, and ability in English and drama, although her dream of becoming a actress is only one of a range of possibilities she finds feasible. Opting for history equally follows her perceived talents and provides a credential no doubt useful for the possibility of university, law and the role of barrister. As well as these three girls, four boys, all from the urban school show continuity from talent, through options to their aspirations, when interviewed towards the end of Year 9. It is to their stories we turn now.

#### **Four Urban Boys**

##### *Edmond's Story*

We find Edmond with his talent in music, opting to study music in years 10 and 11 with the hope of being able to pursue a musical career beyond formal education. This dream has been nurtured by the attendance of Edmond at local auditions for a 'boy band'. While unsuccessful on the first occasion, this has given him the desire for further sojourns into the music business, so much so that it is not only through state education he hopes to learn the skills of the trade, but privately he continues his piano lessons and is also planning to learn to play the guitar to help him acquire competencies he believes are needed to achieve his goal.

Edmond's other aspirations revolve around the world of sport. In the first interview in Year 8 he explained that he would like to be a footballer but recognising the limitations of his talents in the playing of sport, considers the possibility of sports journalism, capitalising on his liking for, and ability in English. He continues through Year 9 to dream of the possibility of a sports related career but presumably is less convinced by the feasibility of this course of action for he says of a conversation about option choices with his parents:

“I wanted to do PE and my mum thought well you obviously made it clear you don’t want a career in it so what’s the point of doing it? (. . .) And I said I simply wanted to do it cos I enjoyed it. [Mum thought] I’m not doing a career in it so I should choose something else which I could fall back on or something.”

(Edmond, late Year 9)

He does not select PE as an option choice for Key Stage 4 but rather elects to take, along with music, Business Studies which he sees as useful for “falling back” on should other job options prove difficult to follow.

While preferring a career in the music business late in Year 9, Edmond still has a yen for sports journalism but, where in Year 8 he saw a place at university as a means to help him achieve his goal by the end of Key Stage 3 the interview took a different turn:

NA: What do you hope to do after Year 11?

Edmond: I hope to go to college and maybe go to some more auditions and things (. . .) for bands and get good A-levels

(. . .)

NA: Why do you want good A-levels?

Edmond: Because if I become a singer they’re something to fall back on

NA: What do you want to do after college?

Edmond: A music career, maybe go to university

NA: Which of those would you prefer?

Edmond: A music career

NA: Why’s that?

Edmond: Because before university I would have done a lot of learning and wouldn’t want to go back and do more

### *Kevin’s Story*

Kevin hankers for a career in football, although this was not one of his stated aspirations in the earlier interviews when he described his goal for the future as that of becoming a

policeman. While this latter goal is still present at the time of the third interview, comments from his out-of-school football team manager seem to have led him to believe that football may be a possible career pathway, where when he was younger, he had less belief in his ability to achieve this. The option choice of PE that Kevin has made for Key Stage 4 follows his talents but also his intrinsic motivation whereas there is no mention of option choices leading to his other aspiration of a job in the police force. In fact he appears to have moved away from linking formal education to this aspiration. In the first interview, in the second term of Year 8 he says:

“I wanna go into like college and learn about the law and everything so I can be a policeman.”

By the end of Year 9, though he dreams of being a footballer he continues to say the job he wants is that of policeman. As we have seen above, he claims to want to gain good results in order to gain a good job. When I ask him what qualifications he needs to gain entry to the police force he responds:

“English and I think it’s maths . . . and you need attitude and discipline.”

I ask him if he thinks school helps him gain what he needs for the job:

“School helps you in English and maths but . . . attitude and discipline’s up to you. They try and help you with that (. . .) like if you’ve got a bad attitude towards staff and all that. Like say if you’re being naughty they put you on report to try and stop that . . .” (Kevin, late Year 9)

He claims he thinks this strategy works, yet the words from the teachers is that Kevin is close to being permanently excluded from the school because of persistent behavioural problems. Academically, he seems to have moved away from the idea of college and the study of law. At the end of Year 9 I ask him what he hopes to do immediately after he leaves school:

"I haven't really thought about it but my mum wants me to join the forces cos she thinks that'll help me get into the police (. . .) cos the police (. . .) for uniform discipline and in the army you get that . . . " (Kevin, late Year 9)

Kevin however seems nonplussed about the idea of joining the army. He claims he is put off this career pathway because of the thought of the dangers of war. He hopes, against hope that football may yet be his salvation:

"I'd love to play for Man United . . . but that wouldn't really happen (. . .) I don't really think I'm good enough (. . .) cos if I was good enough I'd be at the Centre of Excellence at Borborough United or something but I'm not there (. . .) but hopefully I'll still try and might get in." (Kevin, late Year 9)

In Kevin's story we see complexity, confusion and paradox. We see a forlorn hopefulness, an aspiration to succeed in an area he clearly loves, yet an almost certain knowledge that this cannot be. If professional football is likely to allude him, Kevin retains a second hope of his childhood dreams:

"Like I watch The Bill and all that and I like the stuff they do (. . .) like I want to be driving the car . . . going like, getting, chasing the other people and all that in their cars (. . .) I just think it's a good job (. . .) I've always wanted to be a policeman since like five or six." (Kevin, Year 8)

To achieve this he needs basic academic skills as well as 'attitude' and discipline, yet here is the paradox of law breaker desiring the role of law enforcer. That the school tries to help develop the 'right' attitudes and discipline in students is assumed by Kevin, yet he says, it is ultimately him that holds the key to success here. While Kevin, throughout the rounds of interviews has proclaimed his time as miscreant are over, that he has turned over a new leaf and now understands the error of his ways, the teachers stories remain steadfastly constant too: that Kevin is a problem; that he is getting ever closer to serious measures of punishment; that he has yet to make the decision to change his behaviour to that accepted by 'society'.

### *Vince's Story*

Vince, in common with Edmond and Kevin likes the dream of becoming a footballer, though his preferred dream is to become a Formula One racing driver. Neither of these does he appear to seriously consider as realistic options, the former due to limitations in his ability, the latter as a result of a lack of the necessary financial capital. Like Kevin though, he clings to these forlorn dreams throughout the period that this study took place, from Year 8 to the very end of Year 9 at once deriding the possibility and willing it to be. I have asked him if he has any long-term dreams for the future:

"I had one but I know it's not gonna come true because I wanted to be a Formula One driver but to become a Formula One driver you have to start going karting at a pretty young age. You have to have a lot of money to be able to do it cos you've got to have a mechanic who could keep the kart up and running a go-kart of your own, all the safety equipment like helmet, clothes and that and you have to be able to keep travelling a lot to go to go-kart racing and that to race (. . .) [The dream] could [come true] but it's very, very unlikely [but] I'm doing quite a bit of go-karting at the moment . . . not a lot, I haven't got that much money because it's quite expensive but I'm doing quite a bit, more than I usually do . . . to try and, cos you never know, there could be a scout there or something from another team that, from a club, a professional team that wants . . . needs a good driver or something . . ." (Vince, late Year 9)

Beyond these seemingly unattainable dreams, Vince has little to say about the possibilities for his future. He will consider this later once he has discovered what, if anything he is talented at and may elect to progress to college or beyond to improve the talent. What happens in the future, for Vince cannot be conceived of in the present, but is something that will evolve as he wends his way through life. However he already is considering the possibility of at least temporarily leaving full-time education at the end of compulsory schooling in order to earn some money:

- NA: What do you hope to do after Year 11?
- Vince: Well I hope to go to college eventually but I might have a years break between Year 11 then college . . .
- NA: And what would you do in that year?
- Vince: Well possibly like work in McDonalds cos that's what my mum's friends' son is doing . . . and he's getting quite a bit of money from that . . . just a little job [laughs]
- NA: And would you be doing it for the money or would you be doing it for some other reason?
- Vince: I'd be doing it just to get some experience of what it's like and a little bit of money cos everyone needs money really don't they . . . cos you can't live without, well you can, but not very well people without money

In this story we see again the dreams of the working classes set within the sports arena; a possible upwardly mobile path “doubtless explained in part by the fact that these ‘success stories’ symbolize the only recognized route to wealth and fame” (Bourdieu, 1993). Yet for all the dreams, Vince sees a more realistic route, through the fast food service to earn his keep and permit him entry to further education for a destination unknown. Perhaps he will follow in his father's footsteps into the world of computers and to ensure such option may be feasible, Vince selects graphic products in the options available in design and technology, saying:

“Graphic products is computer art basically and I'm quite good on computers cos my dad teaches people how to use a type of computer, AS400s, but he also knows quite a bit about computers so I've learned them . . .” (Vince, late Year 9)

And because he is aware that credentials matter he selects art because:

“I'm good at art so I thought if you're good at something you might as well stick with it cos if you're not very good at something else you may end up doing your GCSEs and get a very low grade for it . . .” (Vince, late Year 9)



For Vince talents may lead to options but these in turn may be detached from the aspirations he holds dear. For Vince too, finance is writ large upon his mind in decision making. That he may decide to leave formal education to earn a little does not mean that he will be lost to the target of increased participation in learning beyond the age of 16, but it highlights the notion of opportunity cost missing from the thinking of the policy-makers. Matthew also has money in mind.

### *Matthew's Story*

In Year 8 Matthew tells us that he wants to go to university and that this is what he believes his parents wish for him because:

“They always tell me to work hard at school . . . and get a, cos he [father] said they didn’t work that hard and they couldn’t get that good a job so tell me to (. . .) My dad played football for Borborough and he didn’t really work that hard at school so when he finished his career he didn’t really get that good a job . . .”  
(Matthew, Year 8)

Matthew, at this stage would like to follow a career that will use his perceived talents in mathematics, considering the possibility of accountancy which he believes pays well. This career pathway stays with him through Year 9 yet he says, when asked if there is anything he would like to do but believes himself unable to do:

Matthew: Play football  
NA: Why do you think you’re not able to do that?  
Matthew: Well I might be able but you’ve got to be like very good to play in the leagues  
NA: And do you think you’re good enough to do that?  
Matthew: I’m not sure yet, don’t know

He goes on to explain that he is a member of the Centre of Excellence in Borborough but that he has yet to discover whether he will be offered a contract with the team beyond the age of 16.

Matthew: If you get another contract that's like you do football in the morning and college in the afternoon. That's quite good and you get paid for it as well

NA: So is that a possibility do you think?

Matthew: Yeah

NA: Right and so are you working towards doing that?

Matthew: Yeah

NA: What would you select if it went to going to college and doing something like maths to go down the accountancy route and going to university (. . .) or going towards the football?

Matthew: I'd rather do football (. . .) more enjoyment (. . .) and I'd get paid while I was

NA: Right and what about in accountancy, do you think you wouldn't particularly enjoy

Matthew: Paid well but it's a bit boring  
(. . .)

NA: But would you be prepared to do that?

Matthew: Yeah but I'd rather do football

Matthew, is the most 'able' of the four boys measured by cognitive ability tests and Key Stage tests. As such he is a clear favourite for university placement and thus measures well in policy-makers' 'success' criteria. In Year 8 he wants to go to university, recognises that his parents wish him to do well and to rise at least financially above their positions. He believes himself to be competent at maths and while he also says he does not particularly like mathematics, never the less he at this stage is considering a possible career that will make use of his mathematical talents and earn him 'good' money. Fifteen months later, Matthew, while still iterating these notions has lost the verve for such 'success' and dreams instead of following his father in his footsteps into league football, where money will flow even while apprenticed and where enjoyment is apt to be a side

product. Enjoyment, and perhaps the subsequent 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) is not a consideration for Matthew's non-sporting alternative career of accountancy. Here is the 'aspiration' almost of desperation to find some job that will pay well and make use of an existing talent. For Matthew, upward mobility is a possibility through routes other than that of sport, yet it is to sport and the intrinsic reward it brings that he is drawn over a pathway of academia and a certainty of boredom, albeit yielding extrinsic gain.

## Summary

The stories of the four boys bring into focus the desire of those with less social capital available to them as a resource through their parents in terms of knowledge and experience of further and higher education, to climb the social and the economic ladder by whatever means at their disposal. They also cast the spotlight on the preference of sport as a tool to mobility over that of academia. While it would be wrong to generalise from such a small sample, this may not auger well for the politicians who have set themselves the target of increasing university participation of people from lower socio-economic status.

Interestingly, though these boys all enjoy sport and others such as Isaac and Keith with middle class origins do so too, only Edmond considers blending academia with sport, and then only indirectly; none speak of pursuing sport-based degrees for instance, only of high publicity careers on the field.

Finally, it should be noted that the above examples were selected because of the enduring nature of the apparent talents, options and aspirations across the time span of the research. Other students linked talents to options but not always to aspirations, options to aspirations but not always to talents, and talents to aspirations but not always to options. Thus William believes himself to be competent at IT and wants to pursue a career in this field but has not elected to study computing or Information Technology specifically at Key Stage 4; Olivia regards herself as able at DT and history and has selected them for her options but is as yet unclear on her career pathway beyond attending university; likewise Sophie who regards herself as able at PE and geography and has elected to study these further to GCSE. Barry has elected, or been selected to take 'complementary studies'

because it involves car maintenance and he seeks to become a car mechanic, though does not speak of any particular talents to warrant such a choice. Through Key Stage 4 Jenni will study art, perhaps leading her along the same career route as her father, as a teacher of art while Darren will follow a course in Information Technology, which he believes himself to be able to do, though is unclear as to his likely future career. Una believes that graphic design might help her achieve her aim of becoming a photographer while Rachel, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 11, has chosen to study a GNVQ in health and social care in order to attempt to become a midwife.

There is some evidence that some young people do consider their talents and their future vocational aspirations when making option choices in Year 9 for their GCSE courses. The government hopes that by increasing the flexibility of courses available, more young people will be able to select learning options that will help them follow chosen career pathways. This, it is claimed will help to motivate the young people and increase the likelihood of them continuing in formal education beyond compulsory schooling, and where appropriate, aspiring to university. From the cases above, we can see a much more complex picture emerging. Not all students have clear vocational aspirations at the age of 14, especially those from more privileged backgrounds. These young people may aspire to higher educational achievements, but they do so it seems, often in ways that allows them to keep open their vocational options for as long as possible. In contrast, those from less privileged backgrounds appear to be closing down the routes available to them through the early selection of career. This may be aided and abetted by the structures they find themselves working within in school, at home and in their respective communities. Such structures were analysed in more detail in Chapter 6. Here though it is worth noting that while young people attending the urban school are offered vocational courses such as GNVQ art, health and social care and information technology, pupils at the rural and private school are given no such options but rather are primed to take a broad range of mainly academically based qualifications. Only those students at the rural school such as Barry and Kelly deemed to find academic work difficult are offered an alternative curriculum which involves 'complementary studies', a flexible study period that includes additional work on basic skills as well as practical, sometimes vocational, activities. At

the urban school a similar course is offered for those who teachers believe may find a full academic timetable particularly taxing. Within this study, Darren has been offered a place on this alternative pathway.

## Chapter 11: Learning to Level

### Introduction

Musing over the data, pondering on how to make sense of the myriad of thoughts captured on paper, from the twenty five young people, ruminating on the notion of learning, testing, futures, hunting for patterns, inspiration, anything, I happened upon the words of Isla. They stepped off the page and begged me think, not of the sample of youngsters and the patterns that may lurk within, but of the individual children; of what learning means to them, of how it affects them and how they affect it; of who they are and what they want to be; of their hopes and fears; of them, their lives, their worlds.

I had asked Isla, at the beginning of the third interview with her, to tell me about what she thought she had learned through Year 9. Her answer surprised me partly because, reading the transcriptions later, I had become accustomed to hearing some facts, whether abstract or concrete, being reeled off. Often also, there was a mention of learning for the “SATs” as the children continue to refer to Key Stage 3 tests. But Isla shared a different set of thoughts with me:

- Isla: . . . I think I've learned how to come to terms with some things like . . . me not knowing as much as other people do and I used to be quite conscious about it but I've just like . . . got over that and now I'd say that everyone's an individual so everyone's different . . . that's about it . . . can't think of anything else
- NA: Did you then in the past feel that you weren't doing as well as other people?
- Isla: Yeah I used to think . . . teachers used to treat me different to other pupils because of my level of learning cos I'm not as bright as other pupils are
- NA: What do you mean by not as bright?
- Isla: Well some pupils are more intelligent than I am in some subjects . . .
- NA: Tell me a bit about how you think the teachers treated you
- Isla: I think that . . . they patronised me a bit

- NA: In what way? Can you give me an example?
- Isla: If . . . I asked how to do something and then they . . . tell me but they'd talk to me as if I was a little child and I didn't understand properly and somebody else didn't understand but was more intelligent or something then they'd just tell them straight away and just help them a bit I suppose . . . they would help but it's just . . . not as much . . . with me ( . . )
- NA: How did you work out that they (the other children) were brighter than you?
- Isla: Because they got, if we had an assessment or something, they got a higher mark, they got a higher percentage or they got . . . we had to do some little quizzes and they had . . . more idea of what the answers are and how to work them out and stuff
- NA: Right so you . . . based it on that . . . when you say you've come to terms with it . . . and everyone's an individual
- Isla: Yeah it was just over like . . . when I was like in Year 7 I used to think that, what we've just said and now I've just grown up a bit and I'm just thinking well they just treat you as . . . an individual in how they think that you should be treated and stuff so, just let them get on with it really [laughs]
- NA: So do you still think that they treat you differently or do you think now that maybe they treat you more like the other people?
- Isla: I'm not sure. I just think that . . . they treat us as individuals but they treat some, they help children that are brighter with respect . . .

Isla is a pupil at Oak Park School, a school that, in the field of English educational results, holds an intermediate position. In terms of her Cognitive Ability Test score at the start of Year 7, Isla retains an intermediate position within the school, while her Key Stage 2 test results – based on teacher assessments from primary school and the information given to me by Isla herself (actual test results are not available) – grade her as a Level 4. That is, she has attained the standard expected of her age group. In general, the young people in the sample interpret this as 'average'.

If a 'Level Four' person feels the need to learn to 'come to terms' with not being as 'bright' as other people, how has she come to this learning? Do other 'Level Four' people feel the same? What stories might students from the urban and private school tell? Boys' stories might reveal a very different picture, but it is important that we should not 'forget' girls in our haste to label boys as the gender with problems. As Francis (1999) points out, some argue that it is only since girls have outperformed boys in the middle and upper classes that the underachievement of boys has become prominent. A comment from one of Rachel's teachers also re-emerged from my mind, that Rachel was a pupil who could "easily be forgotten". These are students who are not regarded as 'problems' nor yet as 'gifted'. They are, by formal accounts, 'average', yet their stories reveal complex young women trying to carve out places for themselves in their respective worlds.

What follows, then are a series of case studies of individuals, graded in English, Maths and Science as, in the words of the students, 'average'. Through these case studies I explore how well students fit into the government's template for pedagogy, setting and assessment. In particular I explore the impact this has on students' construction of their ability (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984) and their aspirations and especially how they interpret the way they are classified and taught.

### **Three Average Girls**

#### *Isla*

As we have seen, Isla is an intermediate student in an 'intermediate' school. She is the second child in a family of four and lives with her mother and younger sister and brother. Her mother is a teacher and her father is a manager of the English division of a European company. Although Isla is unsure of her parent's educational history she thinks her mother definitely went to university and her father may have done. Both parents continue to learn in their jobs, her mother through teaching courses and her father specifically is learning to speak German to enhance his skills in his job.



Reading the script Isla had written during the introductory meeting with the students, half way through Key Stage 3, when I asked those present to write about themselves and themselves as learners, her self-labelling of lower ability is apparent:

“And there are some lessons I dread going to like:

Geography ~ because I’m in the top set I feel I shouldn’t be because I’m not all that good at it.

“History ~ because at my old school we did bits of History but not all that much and everyone in my set (middle) knows more about it than me.”

Nevertheless, Isla also states that she enjoys learning most of the time although she cannot concentrate in Maths and Science due to some boys who distract everyone. Further questioning during the first interview reveals that the distraction comes in the form of the boys:

“... constantly talking, mucking about and throwing stuff and calling people um criticising people my work ...”

Sensitivity to criticism re-emerges later in the interview when I have asked her if there are times when she hasn’t wanted to be involved in an activity. On this occasion it is boys being critical of the standards of her groups’ work in gym and dance that causes her levels of enjoyment to wane although she implies a continuing enjoyment of the activities more generally. However, we return to the notion of others behaviour affecting affection for learning when I ask Isla what would switch her off learning:

“... if there’s something that I don’t enjoy doing or ... I don’t like my teacher which isn’t I don’t, I like all my teachers (. . .) if there were certain people in my class who were ... being stupid and the teacher was constantly stopping every two minutes or something, that would just make me ... fed up and say hey I don’t want to do this any more. I couldn’t be bothered.”

At the time of our first meeting her favourite lessons that she says she loves going to, are drama although here again she adds that she is not so good at it, and German and French because she likes learning new languages. She elaborates on her love of drama during the first interview commenting that it boosts her confidence. In French she finds it difficult but she enjoys it and manages to cope.

Cope is a word that has cropped up earlier in the interview when I ask her if she thinks she learns anything from watching 'soaps' on television, one of her pastimes:

"I think I learn to cope with things cos they have . . . they do . . . things with people with problems and stuff and I think (I) learn if that ever happens to me how to cope with it cos I see how they've coped with it."

When talking about her ability during the first interview Isla talks of being good, but not brilliant, at activities she participates in out of school, while in school she says she "feels" she's good at most subjects and OK at others using setting as a means of positioning. When I ask if she thinks there are any subjects for which she would describe herself neither as average nor good she replies:

"... I don't think there is, I mean I may be a bit . . . self confident but I have this, I don't know, I can't really say that I'm brilliant at this or I'm rubbish at that cos I'm not sure because I don't know . . . there isn't any subjects that I think I'm rubbish at or any that I can't do."

These statements show something of a contradiction in Isla's thinking. Although only days earlier she had appeared to label herself as of 'lower ability' in certain subjects, here she places herself in a range of ability positions. She hints at being in a 'bottom group' though further investigation makes this unlikely. What Isla seems to be suggesting here is that she is 'OK', maybe 'average', perhaps verging on 'good' but that she still doubts her abilities at times in certain contexts.

Isla reflects that she forms her opinions on her ability by:

“... thinking about the marks and the grades I get in my tests and my reports sort of thing.”

I ask her to consider whether she thinks everyone is equally able:

“... Um in a way ... oh I don't know what that means ... I think they're equally able ... to do certain things ... but they're er ... oh I don't know how to put it ... there are a few things that people are really good at and things that people aren't good at but there are ... people (that) are good ... at everything, well not everything but they're good at whatever they try to do. Everyone tries their best.”

Her uncertainty about her abilities appears again when she is talking about how able she thinks her friends believe her to be:

“... if there's something that I feel that probably I can't do like if there's something ... if I can't ... do my homework without some help ... and I take it in the next day, I say look this really isn't very good, I could've done better ( . . . ) and they say 'no that's really good' ... but I don't know if they're just saying it to ( . . . ) compliment me or what.”

On the other hand, she believes her father, and possibly her mother, are proud of her because of the “good” marks she attains. Of teacher's views of her ability she responds:

“Well ... I think they view us all the same ... but it's just some of us they know that need extra help and they try and give us that help ... so I think they view us basically the same.”

This is particularly interesting given that the chapter started with Isla's comments about her notion that she knows less than other people and that teachers treat students differently dependent upon their ability levels. The quotes above were made almost a year before she

spoke of this feeling of differentiation, yet when I asked her about the timing of the teacher's behaviours she spoke of remembering from Year 7. In other words, Isla recalls from memory in Year 9 something she does not mention in Year 8.

Isla thinks the purpose of learning is to get a "good education" which is needed "to help you through life" and without which "you won't be able to get very far". She believes learning to be "really important" to gain "good" marks at A-level and to obtain a "good" job. But, she goes on:

- Isla: I think learning's important to everybody . . . but for different reasons
- NA: What other reasons may people have for learning?
- Isla: Um. . . there's some people that do it because of their parents . . . parents may be pushy or say look if you haven't got this right you've got to get it right next time and I mean . . . they get really angry or something. They try to do it to please their parents or something and some people they do it . . . I think they think it's important because . . . their earning ability because they want to get a good job and . . . be able to have a family and be able to support them I suppose . . .
- NA: Do you think you do want to learn because of your parents or do you think you do it for other reasons?
- Isla: I think I do it for . . . myself and my future because anyway my dad's being a bit pushy at the moment . . .

Isla describes briefly a family difficulty involving the education of her older sister and communications with their father. In my field notes I have added that at this point in the interview she appeared uncomfortable if not upset when talking about this. Isla concludes this conversation:

" . . . he expects me he thinks that I might do exactly what my sister did."

At the time of the first interview, when Isla is mid way through Year 8 her future aspirations are vague. She tells me that she did have an ambition to be a chef but that this

was thwarted somewhat by her setting light to a carpet at home. Why she might select a career in catering is not clear from the interview. Whatever she does she wants to enjoy the job otherwise she says she won't do it; she also will be looking for a job with decent pay though she says:

Isla: . . . I wouldn't want anything that pays too much or anything . . . or  
if it pays too little

NA: Why would you not want something that pays too much?

Isla: . . . Because . . . I know that cos I'd probably take it for granted

She thinks she'd want to work with people as she likes working with people but there is nothing she is specifically aiming for at this time.

Prior to leaving full time education, Isla hopes to stay on at the school through the sixth form:

"... and then ... my dad wants me to go to university which I might do if I get good enough grades in my A-levels ( . . ) I think he wants me to go to university ... because he wants me to do my best ... he thinks that I've got the ability to be able to go into university ( . . ) but I'm really not too sure ( . . ) whether I want to go to university ( . . ) I don't know but I think it'd be a good experience if I did go ( . . ) but I just I don't want to ... plan my future now."

Given her father's physical absence from the home, he clearly remains influential in Isla's life and long-term future.

I ask her what her mother's views are on her future:

"I think she wants me, I think she will back me up whatever I decide ( . . ) and she hopes that I will do my best which I will."

When I ask Isla how important she thinks her parents think learning is for her she replies:

“Very important I think (. . .) because if I didn’t go to school I didn’t learn I wouldn’t know anything, well I would but . . . I wouldn’t be able to . . . support myself because I wouldn’t be able to get a job.”

However this is not the whole story about why it is important to learn according to Isla. In response to the question ‘What switches you on to learning?’ she says:

“ . . . mainly it’s because I don’t really want to not learn and I don’t (sic) want to know anything when I’m older. If I’ve had children I want to be able to help them if they have problems or something and I wouldn’t be able to help them.”

Approximately five months later I meet Isla again. On this occasion my questioning revolves around two specific areas of schooling. Firstly I want to find out more about her thoughts surrounding testing and judgements being made of her and secondly I want her to reflect on what she would like to learn about in Key Stage 4, if she were free from the structures and constraints of school option choices. It is to this dialogue we now turn to explore some more aspects of Isla’s thinking about learning.

From the second round of interviewing we learn that Isla tends to get quite good assessments and that comments from teachers about her work revolve around statements to keep trying hard in the way she presently is so as to get better marks in the next tests. She cannot think of a time when she has received a negative comment, although she later tells me that in Year 7 she was set targets in German to work harder, stop chatting and concentrate more.

On testing Isla states that she revises as much as possible as she wants to do well in tests. Marks are important to her as an indicator of whether she is “doing as best I can”. She claims to never have gained below seventy percent and always to have gained above the class average perceiving this to be good. Isla believes the purpose of tests is to see how well you are doing and to see if you are in the right set. Of Key Stage tests she comments

that the purpose of SATs are to see if you have made the right option choices for Year 10 and 11.

Isla, at this point in time, in the latter half of the first term of Year 9, identifies that if she were given a free choice in what she could learn about in Year 10 and 11 she would select mathematics, drama, dance and languages. For dance and drama her reason for the selection is intrinsic although there is a hint that there may be an instrumental reason also when she says “I’d like to work up to and do things around acting and same with dancing”. It is not clear and she was not questioned further at the time to clarify, if she does indeed mean to work, ultimately in the field of performance. Her reason for the selection of mathematics is initially that she needs to work harder as she is not doing well at it. When questioned further as to why she would want to learn more about a subject she thinks she is not doing well at she explains:

“Cos . . . maths is my weakest subject cos that’s the only subject I’m in a lower set for . . . I just want to work my way up ( . . . ) A few weeks ago I was talking with one of my friends about what we’re going to do for work and everything and I was thinking about things that don’t involve maths and I was thinking there isn’t many that you don’t need maths for so I was thinking that I’m going to do maths for GCSE and hopefully I’ll get a good grade for that but if I don’t then I’ll can still probably get a decent job.”

Of languages Isla says she would probably choose them:

“. . . because my parents, especially my dad, is always saying how well I’m doing in them cos he needs languages for his work so he’s always on the phone, he’s always testing me in German and my mum’s brother’s French so he’s always testing me in French and they’re saying ( . . . ) they’re wanting me, my dad wants me to go to university and do languages there. So does my mum but I don’t know suppose ( . . . ) I don’t know, I’d probably do it for my GCSEs because I’d like a job that involves travelling cos I love travelling and so I’d need my languages for that and I’ll definitely do languages for my GCSEs cos I

want ( . . . ) they could get you good jobs . . . if you get quite good qualifications from them so I think those will be what I'll be doing."

Once again, as in Year 8, we see the absent presence of her father in her thinking. It is he, rather than Isla that seems to have selected languages and although Isla is not sure of his choice, she 'probably', or even 'definitely' will follow his advice, so far at least, if not all the way to university.

In terms of ways of working in order to help her learn her chosen subjects Isla likes to work in pairs as it is then possible to confer and help each other. She enjoys all types of learning activity but thinks that variety is important.

The third interview was held towards the end of Year 9, at the end of Key Stage 3. This interview began, as we have already seen by Isla talking about learning to come to terms with her not knowing as much as other people. Reading the text with this in mind, a number of further references to Isla's self-perception of her identity present themselves.

Isla comments that she thinks:

" . . . some people are afraid to do things because they think they're not very good at it . . . "

I ask Isla if she might be frightened of doing something that she thinks she's not very good at. She explains:

Isla: I think it's just I get embarrassed easily and I think in subjects that we're doing like ( . . . ) we're just answering questions, teachers will ask us questions and we can all give our opinions on it, I don't really give my opinion on it because I think it'll be wrong ( . . . ) because I know, well I don't know but I think that it might be wrong because it'll be different to what other people are saying and people might laugh at me [laughs]. I'm really shy about that



- NA: So do you think you often have opinions?
- Isla: Yeah
- NA: (. . .) And do you believe that they're wrong, or do you just think that other people might think that?
- Isla: No I just think other people might think they're wrong because they're different to what they think

Later in the interview Isla describes a debating activity she has been involved with:

"... it really means something because I don't normally get involved in things like this because I get shy and that just made me think, that I've actually achieved something. I've actually let people know how I feel about things and they haven't taken the mick and they haven't laughed."

We talk about Key Stage 3 tests. She tells me they were nerve wracking although she says they are not major tests like GCSEs or A-levels. Nevertheless, she studied hard for them as she wants to do well and likes to do her best. She also notes that the tests:

"... put you forward for your ... sets in ... other years when you go up into your GCSEs and your A-levels."

When I ask her if it is important which set she is in there is a continuity with her description of her as learner that she gave almost seventeen months earlier. She says it is not really important to her the set she is in and continues:

"... because I don't want to be put in a set that is going to be too hard for me and I don't want to be put in a set that's too easy for me (. . .) because if I (was) put in a set that I would find hard instead of a set that I would find just right for me then I wouldn't know as much as the other people in the set and I wouldn't get very good grades for it I suppose (. . .) but I suppose it would help me learning more but ... they'd be going at a ... faster pace than me so they'll be working on things that maybe I should be, wouldn't even be up to yet ... and the group that I should be in probably (would) just be working slowly at our own

pace and so if I was put in (a set) that are too difficult for me then I'll be working at a pace that I'm not used to."

It is a pace she does not think she would be able to work at.

The notion of 'coping', featured in the language used by Isla in our first two meetings, reappears when I ask Isla if she thinks she learned anything by taking the Key Stage 3 tests:

"I think I learned how to cope with the pressure that you're under by the teachers to try and to try your best and that would help when I've got my GCSEs which are in two years."

Isla also thinks the tests made her realise how important learning is:

"... because ... you can maybe go to university or college because you've learned all the things during the years you've been at school and then you can get a decent job and if you want to start a family again you can help your children."

By the third interview option choices have been made for GCSEs. Isla has selected Child Development, Media Studies and Spanish, the first because she likes children and it may help her to get a job, the second she is not sure about her reasons for choosing but thinks that media studies is "different", and the third of her options was selected because she likes languages and may work in Spain.

She would like to drop, but is not allowed to, religious education as she says she is not too good at this attributing her difficulties to the use of a supply teacher and the behaviour of some of the boys which results in her not concentrating as much as she thinks she should. Concentration appears to have been an issue for Isla dating back to primary school as her transfer report to secondary school suggests. She herself recognises that she is prone to "drift off" in class and day dream, putting this down to times when she is bored. She recognises also that she needs to look at her work and consider ways to improve because:

“... in our first year here when I was in Year 7 (...) well the teachers didn't think my work was up to like the standard it should be, that they think I should (...). The lady said 'Right go away, look at that and think how you can improve it and that happened at primary school as well.'”

Now, she says, teachers do not need to prompt her as she does this checking for herself. The help provided earlier in her learning career may be as a result of a special needs stage one statement recorded at primary school.

At the time of the third interview, Isla thinks she learns best by the use of practical lessons where she is actually doing something, including in this reading and answering questions. She can think of no ways of learning that she dislikes but feels that copying off the board in a rush, when there is no time to read what she is writing is not conducive to learning.

After GCSEs Isla would like to stay at the school and proceed into the sixth form to take A-levels. To do this she thinks she may need to gain certain grades at GCSE and hopes she will achieve B and C grades that she thinks is attainable for her if she tries hard. She wants grades that she is pleased with and that also please her teachers and her parents. Dependent upon her grades she may go to university to study for child psychiatry or “the police”, these being her current preferences for a long-term career. When asked if there is anything she would like to do but thinks she would not be able to do, Isla tells me that although she would not describe herself as able she will have a go and if she doesn't succeed at least she will have tried something.

### **Continuity and Change: The Complexity**

From the case study it appears that there are a number of strands in Isla's learning career (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000; Pollard and Filer, 1996; 1999) that have changed little over the course of the study and although the period of the study spans only sixteen to seventeen months, nevertheless, it is at a phase of adolescent development that folk theory might have us believe was at its most turbulent.

Isla's apparent unease about her level of ability, which she dates from at least Year 7 appears to continue through to Year 9 when she is concerned that she is graded into the correct set for her to make progress. Although she feels she needs to come to terms with her perceived lesser ability as compared to some others in the year she also rates herself, in the first interview as good or average while in the second interview she says she is above average. Throughout she retains the notion that she needs and/or wants to achieve her best, this requiring that she maintains a particular level of effort in order to improve. However, she also consistently mentions the possibility of a lack of concentration, on occasions attributing the behaviour to the behaviour of others, at another time alluding to her ability while on another occasion she mentions boredom as the causation.

Her father, although absent from the family home, clearly plays a significant role in Isla's thinking about learning and this does not appear to change through the period of study. Nor does Isla's reference to 'coping'. Although this notion is only briefly touched upon in the interviews, this, linked with Isla's comments on her sensitivity to criticism, ability levels, her fear of ignorance or embarrassment at the thought of being different to others and her nervousness in exams can have the effect of conjuring up an image of Isla as someone who may feel life as a struggle. Yet her drive to do better, to please - herself and others, her apparent ability to accept the way she finds formal learning and her possible long term aspirations to learn lend themselves to an image of Isla as a trier.

In terms of Isla's thoughts regarding the purpose of learning there is continuity here also. From the first to the third interview, she sees learning as necessary to gain a good education in order to gain qualifications which may, if they are good enough, gain her a place at university and will certainly help her to obtain a "decent job", providing both financial security for any future family as well as ensuring her own ability to help her next generation. It is worth noting here the centrality of Isla's family – present and the possibility of future - in her life.

The changes in Isla appear to come in more concrete form: her option choices and her working career aspirations. In the case of the former her choice, when given the fanciful task of imagining a completely free choice were maths, drama, dance and languages, all possibly for instrumental reasons, but with drama and dance also having intrinsic value and languages seemingly partially included because of the influence of both her father and her uncle. Her actual option choices are Child Development, Media Studies and Spanish. Here we see continuity in her interest in languages as the selection of Spanish is in addition to German that she will take as her foundation modern language. Maths is, of course, a core subject and by the time of the third interview Isla will be aware that this is a compulsory subject to GCSE. The discontinuity arises in the change from drama and dance to child development and media studies. At Oak Park drama may be selected for study to GCSE so, although Isla had talked of her love of the subject at the first interview and had continued to show an interest at the second, this interest had not held strongly enough to warrant the subjects selection by the end of Year 9. The data from the interviews does not help us identify a possible reason for this change. Media studies, does however involve the making of films as well as critical academic work so that all break with performance has not necessarily been taken. Isla's choice of child development appears to have few roots in her past aspirations but taken with her current career preferences may be reflective of these.

By the end of Year 9 Isla is talking of the possibility of a career in child psychiatry or the police force, neither conforming to her earlier aspiration to be a chef but fitting in with her aspirations at the time of the first interview to work with people. She also mentions on passing that Spanish may be useful as she may choose to work in Spain but the amount of conviction in this seems in doubt.

### *Rachel*

In terms of Key Stage 2 results Rachel can be likened to Isla in so much as they both achieved Level 4 in all three subject area and may thus be described as average or intermediate. Rachel attends Willow Way School, a school that, using GCSE examination

data and Ofsted reports as evidence resides in a lowly position amongst English schools. Rachel's Cognitive Ability Test score sets her high within the school but intermediate within the sample. My immediate thought of Rachel, on finding her to be a 'Level Four' pupil was that she had been described by one of the teachers as a student that could easily be forgotten. That is to say, she is hard working, careful, quiet and introverted, lacking in self confidence and is not particularly willing to participate in discussions. The teacher also described her as "a super girl". This is consistent with her transfer records from primary school where it is written of Rachel that she is hard working, sometimes requiring support; a "delightful child". One teacher, however, who has taught her in Year 7 and Year 9 says that while she was a very hard worker earlier in her school career she now is "more prepared to drift". She still does her work but she is not stretching herself as much as she could and is more involved in "idle chatter" getting upset if the teacher suggests moving her. This teacher feels that Rachel has no understanding that she needs to be "involved" in order to remember methods and routines.

Rachel is the eldest of two children and lives with her mother, a factory worker, her father, a skilled worker and her younger brother. Her father has craft training while nothing is known of her mother's educational history.

Rachel did not complete the introductory activity, so my first meeting with her was at the first interview. Out of school Rachel has a history – "I've always found it interesting since I was little" – of an interest in swimming. She now is a member of a local swimming club and has been selected for a squad. Of school Rachel says she enjoys it and likes all the friends she has at school. She also says, however, that the only activity she doesn't enjoy out of school is homework, "anything" being better than doing homework.

Within school Rachel likes art and food technology – described as one of her favourites. She "doesn't mind" mathematics, history and geography preferring geography to history, quite likes science and enjoys languages quite a lot. She prefers active, practical and possibly visual tasks to written work thus of English she says:

“I don’t really like English that much at the moment cos it’s just quite a lot of writing and . . . I’m not bad at writing but it gets a bit boring after a while ( . . . ) I don’t mind reading it (a book) but it was afterwards we either had to do a diary of it, like one of the main characters ( . . . ) and you’d have to do . . . like a diary for him, like of how he was feeling and . . . what happened to him ( . . . ) I found it a bit boring ( . . . ) I suppose it was just repeating like writing out the book, putting more words than the book.”

There have been times when she enjoyed English and found it interesting:

“Well last year in Year 7 we did autobiography and that was quite good because we didn’t have the work set ( . . . ) The teacher like put a list on the board of what you had to have and you could do as much writing as you wanted or as many pictures or you could just do it in a cartoon strip or you could do it as a page of writing and like stuff like that cos you had your own choice ( . . . ) I did a bit of both, a bit of writing and some pictures.”

I ask her to reflect on why she prefers geography to history. She responds:

“I find history, I don’t find it difficult but it’s . . . I’m trying to find a way of putting it . . . you get some of the questions where you have to like use stuff, you have to explain yourself about what you mean and I’m not very good at doing that ( . . . ) I’m quite good in geography cos I know like all the countries on the map and quite good with co-ordinates and I just find that a bit more interesting ( . . . ) learning about all the different places ( . . . ) We’ve been doing quite a lot on Italy and we done about rivers as well and like we was learning about all the different rivers and all the different places in Italy and the population and that ( . . . ) (In history) you get like different sources and it’s as though someone like, at the moment we’re doing the revolution, the French revolution and you get someone that wrote a piece of writing like as though they was in it ( . . . ) and the question would ask you ‘What do you think they meant when like they wrote this?’ and I just can’t explain it, what like, what I mean ( . . . ) Can’t find a way of putting it into writing.”

Later, when she is talking about finding English boring because it's about repeating what is already in a book, I ask if there are other subjects she does this in:

"Well I suppose sometimes . . . in history you read something, like you read a page and on the next page there's questions about it and ( . . . ) you only have to go back and refer to the book and like write out what it says, or write it out in your own words just what it said so you're just repeating something out of the book."

Of science she says:

"Like science I think is interesting cos it's always, you always wonder what's going to happen when you put like something in, like a chemical into water ( . . . ) we put pieces of metal over a bunsen burner ( . . . ) and one just completely melted and the other is like a sparkler and ( . . . ) that was really interesting cos you didn't know what was going to happen next."

And of languages, for which she is in the top set, she comments:

"I enjoy it quite a lot . . . cos it's not just, we don't just like write everything down and then revise it, we like play it in games and that ( . . . ) like (the teacher will) put some stuff on the overhead projector and we'll like play games with it and that and do songs as well, sing songs."

It may not only be the pedagogical style that influences Rachel's preferences across the school curriculum, however. Maths she claims to 'not mind' but on further questioning a more detailed understanding of the meaning of the statement comes to light:

Rachel: Well . . . on the last subject we did the test ( . . . ) and we got the marks back and I got the highest mark in the class so . . . cos I liked that topic. It was pie charts and line graphs ( . . . ) so it was quite interesting

NA: Are there topics that you don't like?



Rachel: Algebra [laughs] I just can't do algebra  
NA: You can't do?  
Rachel: Well I can do some of it but the other's just really complicated so . .

She rates herself not very good at religious education saying that she doesn't really like the subject and gets confused about all the different religions. However, although she says that she thinks she tends to enjoy subjects more if she knows how to do them, lessons that are too easy are boring.

In deciding her ability Rachel bases her judgements on test results, whether she gains gold or silver stickers and how prepared she is to answer questions in class. Asked if her results position in class is important to her, of her recent mathematical success she says:

"Well it was like, I was quite chuffed about it and everything but . . . that's the first I've come first. I've come like in the middle before and it doesn't bother me as long as I get an average mark (. . .) if I get below the average mark it's sort of like bit disappointing and . . . sort of like well you think you could've done better and things."

What 'average' mark means needs some consideration. Rachel is in set two for maths and says:

". . . pretty much everybody in my group is about the same ability but there's still some questions some can do and some can't."

When I ask if she thinks everyone has equal ability over the whole year group she states:

"No some are higher and some are like much lower and that."

I ask her why she thinks this might be so. She tells me:

“I don’t know really, like when I was little before I even started school my mum used to do a lot of it with me and she used to make me practice my times tables and she used to read books with me and I used to have to read every night (. . .) and I used to have to do my tables every night but some parents don’t like do that with theirs (. . .) might make a difference.”

Her family thinks she is doing well at school and she thinks her friends would rate her as having quite good ability. She thinks some of her friends are a bit better than her and some of them not so. One of her friends, she says, is quite brainy but even she finds some things more difficult than others. Her guide for ability is again test scores but is also based on whether her friends ask her for help with their work. Of teachers’ views of her ability she responds:

“I think they know how able I am cos in like maths for example my teacher (. . .) I’ll finish the work and she’ll give me the next set of work and then go to a different person and know that they’ll need something harder or something easier and give that to them so (. . .) after you’ve finished the work that the whole class have got to do she’ll give you something that you’ve got to do of your ability.”

Rachel does not, she says, know what the purpose of learning is. However, when asked to tell me what is important to her in her life she names, along with friends and family, school. Of the importance of school, as we have seen earlier, she explains that this is because she enjoys it and likes her friends at the school but she adds:

“I suppose I try to always do my best at school because I wouldn’t, I want to get good GCSEs and get a good job I suppose.”

Given that this comment was forthcoming in the Spring term of Year 8 when Rachel was 12/13 years old, this may seem quite advanced, Ruddock et al (1996) claiming that the shift from intrinsic values of learning to the economic tend to be seen between Year 9 and Year 10. On the other hand, it fits with the finding of Blatchford (1996) who states that 53% of the 11 year olds participating in his study, saw the purpose of learning as to get good results and a good job.

Rachel aspires to go to college although she does not yet know what she might like to study, this being dependent upon her chosen career that she has not yet selected. At sixteen she will get a Saturday job as well as going to college but after that she thinks she may become a computer programmer or work in an office. University, which would be required for some jobs such as doctor or computer programmer, may be considered. Her parents would like her to go to college and get a good job but they “don’t mind” about university. Rachel’s career aspirations are in flux. Rachel wants a job with a bit of challenge that is different everyday. She has thought about being a hairdresser, a beautician or an airhostess but changed her mind about the last of these as she would not “want to be away from home all the time.”

Although she does not know what she does want to do she knows what she does not want to do in her working life:

“... factory work or shop work (. . .) I’d like to get a good job where you get a lot of money and like an interesting job and my mum works in a factory (. . .) and she says it’s really boring and says like ‘Oh I hope you get a better job than this’ and that sort of thing”

In the second interview, held early in November, in the first term of Year 9, Rachel reflects on the comments and judgements that have been made about her work. She cites a maths test result that was the highest in the class, although whether this is the same result as mentioned in the earlier interview is impossible to tell from the data available. She also speaks of gaining an A\* for a piece of art work. In English, however her Year 8 report had highlighted a weakness in spellings resulting in her mother making her practice this area. Although Rachel did not like this work she believes it to be helpful for later exams she will have to take, though for herself she is “not bothered” by her difficulty in spelling that she says has always been problematic for her.

As with her spellings, so Rachel is also “not bothered” about receiving the highest mark in tests although it is “nice” to do so. However she does, like to gain at least an average mark

which she apparently usually achieves. The school uses a system of effort and achievement gradings for individual pieces of work. Rachel recognises that she sometimes achieves a relatively low effort grade and this often coincides with a low achievement grade as well. Her explanation for this is that her low grades are usually linked to rushing to finish the work, whereas if she takes the work home to complete, and spends time doing so, both her effort and achievement marks are likely to rise.

Tests, which Rachel is also “not bothered” by are, she says, to put people into sets of ability for doing GCSEs, so as to allow pupils to “learn better”. Were a pupil to find him/herself in too low a set, s/he would be “kept back” because the pace would be too slow. Rachel is in “quite good” sets, thus for technology and humanities she is in set one, while for maths and science she is in the second set. I ask Rachel how she thinks she would react to being moved from set one to set two. She replies:

Rachel: I wouldn't mind but I suppose it would bother me a bit cos then I'd know that I haven't been working very well like as what I have been before.”

NA: So you think it would be about how much work you were putting in if you were moved down a set?

Rachel: Yeah and effort and things like that

Of a move from set two to set three she retorts:

“I think that would be quite disappointed then cos . . . that's getting below average.”

Reflecting on her likely response to a move from set two to set one, Rachel points out that this has already happened to her in Year 7 and that:

“I was quite worried that I wouldn't be able to keep up with the pace of the work of everybody else but I was quite pleased with myself as well for doing like such good work and effort so I could get moved up.”

However she does not think additional effort is likely to help her move up a set for maths as she regards herself as average in this subject. In science on the other hand, where she is gaining higher grades, such a move might be possible. I ask whether she ever tries to put more effort into areas where she receives a B grade in order to gain an A:

“I’d be quite happy with a B . . . I do my best at putting effort and quality into the work but I’d be quite happy if I got a B for it.”

Rachel is asked to consider what lessons she would opt to take in Year 10 and 11 if she was given a free choice. She is unsure about this as her options would be chosen to help her with her career but she does not know yet, at the time of the second interview, what she would like this to be. She says that she would have to take English, maths and science as these are compulsory and when I ask her to envisage that this is not the case, she responds that she would probably take them anyway as maths is a requirement for most jobs and she quite likes English and science. As with her career aspirations in the first interview, Rachel seems to find it easier to deselect options. She would not wish to opt to study child care as she does not want a job working with children and she would get rid of religious education and personal, social and health education as she “hates” these finding them to be “boring”.

The second interview also elicits that, at this point in time, Rachel’s preferred ways of learning are through the use of games and class discussions. She dislikes copying off the board but likes project work where she can work with her best friend, sharing the work, doing homework together and, she claims, thus putting more effort into the quality of the work.

As for all the interviewees, the third interview began by my asking Rachel to tell me what she had learned about in Year 9. Her response was closer to the ‘standard’ response of the students in the sample than that of Isla’s:

“Well this year we’ve like mainly been doing a lot of revising for our SATs from the beginning of this year, but now they’re all over we’re sort of starting new topics and everything.”

Asked if she can think of anything in particular that she has learned this year she says she does not know. Further questioning reveals an apparently vague recollection of a question from the maths Key Stage 3 test. Later she tells me what she learned about Macbeth in English just before the tests:

- Rachel: Well all the sort of play is put into English so that you’d understand what actually happened and . . . all sorts of things like that and understanding the actual Shakespeare’s like writing
- NA: And what was it that you had to understand about his writing?
- Rachel: Like what some words meant and . . . what the phrases meant that he used
- NA: Can you think of a phrase that he used and what it meant?
- Rachel: . . . No not off the top of my head
- (. . .)
- NA: What was the purpose of learning about Macbeth and about Shakespeare? Why do you need to know that?
- Rachel: . . . I don’t know [laughs]

At the end of Year 9 Rachel says she likes working in groups as everyone has different ideas and because you are not responsible for the whole project, the work becomes easier. She believes class discussions help her learn the most:

“. . . cos when you’re talking about it you actually have to think about it like whereas if you write off the board you just write it and (. . .) you’re not really thinking about it, you’re just copying off the board.”

Yet we have heard earlier, at the beginning of the case study, from one of her teachers that she can be reticent to participate in discussions, this being borne out by another of her teachers. It is worth noting, however that Rachel herself has identified that in some

lessons she is more adept at answering questions, those she believes her ability to be greater in.

Exploring Rachel's actual option choices we find that she has selected GCSEs in German, food technology, painting and drawing and GNVQ Health and Social Care. Her reasons for selection are various. The school options, based on National Curriculum criteria are structured so that she must select at least one modern foreign language, hence German, which she describes as liking better than French; food technology and painting and drawing have been chosen because she likes them, the former being her favourite subject, though she is unsure as to whether these subjects will help her obtain employment; and health and social care has been selected because she believes she needs it for the job she now hopes to do.

In terms of career aspirations, Rachel now hopes to gain good GCSEs at grade C or above as these are required to gain entry into college for the career she wants, this being to study nursing and then become a midwife. She gives as her reasons for her career choice that she believes the job would be interesting and it would help people. She says that if she tries hard she should be able to gain the results she needs. Rachel seems unaware that in order to achieve her goal GCSEs are no longer sufficient credentials. To become a midwife she will have to gain a degree.

### **Continuity and Change: The Complexity**

As with Isla, so has Rachel a number of strands that appear to remain fairly constant over the sixteen month period of study. Likewise, Rachel also has had some fractures in her thinking about learning and it is to the continuity and change within Rachel's discourse that we now turn.

The overall impression of Rachel is of a hard working, reasonably conscientious girl whom teachers generally find pleasant and unobtrusive in their lives. This harmonious picture appears to have its roots at least in later primary school and, apart from some "idle

chattering”, still holds ‘true’ at the end of Year 9. However Rachel is herself aware of times when she has exerted less effort and reaped lesser rewards as a consequence and her lack of effort in taking work home in Year 9 may be reflective of her dislike of homework in Year 8. She likes to ‘try her best’, but there is a ceiling on the effort required. In similar vein, she likes to gain high marks but is unperturbed so long as her results do not fall below her floor of average. Her apparent blasé attitude extends to taking tests and gaining test results and, unlike Isla, she appears little disturbed by her ability position amongst her peers, nor the differentiation of work she notes occurs with teachers. It is worth noting however, that Isla is an ‘intermediate’ student in an ‘intermediate’ school whereas Rachel is in a ‘high’ position in a ‘low’ positioned school, so peers may be positioned differently for the two girls. Nevertheless, signs of concern about Rachel’s level come when she comments about being worried that she would not be able to keep up with the work when she was moved to a higher set in humanities in Year 7 and at the thought of being in a set that is lower than ‘average’.

According to Rachel it would seem that throughout her life, Rachel’s mother has been keen to support and encourage her daughter’s learning, perhaps in a way not available to all Rachel’s peers. However, although her parents are portrayed as eager for Rachel to do better than her mother, in terms of career, it seems likely that there is a glass ceiling placed upon their aspirations where university is concerned. This ceiling is reflected in her choice of options, but it is not just a glass ceiling that is shown, but also a lack of understanding of the ‘rules of the game’, aided and abetted by the options on offer at the urban school.

Rachel’s educational aspirations have changed little over the period of the study. She wants to achieve good grades at GCSE, which by the end of Year 9 she translates into Cs and above, one presumes through greater knowledge of the requirements for her present career choice. She continues to closely link the credentials required for employment to her option choices and infers also through her comments about her weakness at spellings, that effort may also be exerted in order to achieve her desired ends. Nevertheless, not all her option choices are linked to employment. Leaving German to one side, as this is a choice of limited scope between two modern languages, her choice of food technology and



painting and drawing are for intrinsic purposes and show continuity in her personal areas of interest across the latter half of Key Stage 3. Curiously, neither of these areas coincide with her most recent career preference. Indeed at no time throughout the period of study has Rachel appeared to link her areas of interest with her long-term future. We will look at the discontinuity in her career aspirations presently, but one further area of continuity is visible in Rachel's story.

When we explore Rachel's espoused preference for ways of learning there is a hint of an aversion to the written word in the first interview, half way through Year 8. Although in later interviews the aversion comes across as a dislike of copying rather than writing per se, she nevertheless retains a stronger liking for activity and involvement in learning, as well as selecting group work as a means of enhancing learning. Her desire to be involved in learning seems contrary to one teacher's view of her and her understanding of learning but the limitations of the available data prevent further analysis of this anomaly.

What the data is able to show us is, like Isla, a moving picture regarding career hopes. Like Isla, Rachel seems to be aware that her early thoughts on careers have been changeable and unreliable. In Year 8 she mentioned earlier dreams of being a hairdresser, beautician or airhostess. Later in the same interview her more recent thoughts revolved around computer programming or office work, and an interest in a job with challenge, variation and "decent" pay. By the end of Year 9 she aspired to be a midwife, mirroring her desire for a job with variation and, undoubtedly, challenge, but quite different from her previous musings and involving children, albeit very young, when the first interview elicited her aversion to opting to learn about child care as she did not wish to be employed in the field of children.

### *Briony*

The third case study is of Briony who, like the previous two girls, appears to have attained the governments 'expected level' by the end of Key Stage 2, although in Briony's case there are no teacher assessment marks to compare her own claims to. Nor are the results

complete as she is only able to proffer Level 4 in English and science, being unable to recall her mathematics result. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the course of the case study, Briony does not portray herself as a high achiever in mathematical subjects.

Although Briony is an ‘average’ student in national terms according to her Key Stage results, as a pupil at Beech Hill School, she holds a low position within the school in terms of her entrance examination scores, these being cognitive ability tests but administered by a different company to those used in the two state schools and thus not directly comparable. Beech Hill is a private school holding high status within the sample of schools used in this study in terms of GCSE results. Briony’s position in academic terms is thus more complex to describe for she is a nationally intermediate pupil with low status in a high status institution.

Briony lives with her mother, her father being employed abroad. She has two older half sisters one of whom is training to be a teacher and the other works as a model. Her mother is self employed and has carried on her educational interest in the history of art, in which she has a degree, into her employment. Briony’s father has a history of working abroad and from birth Briony has consequently had the opportunity to visit a range of countries around the world. Her father is a director in an international company but Briony is not able to inform us about his academic achievements.

Briony’s written piece of work about herself and herself as learner, which was completed during the course of our first meeting, is crammed with information about her life and thoughts on learning. From it can be distilled her love of nature, travel, sport, arts and crafts and creative writing all of which fill her spare time along with reading, music, including learning to play the piano, and watching films. All of these things, she writes, are “to do with learning”. Similar to both Isla and Rachel, Briony claims to:

“ . . . think school is quite fun ( . . . ) (and) find learning fun in some cases but I know most people don’t agree. It really depends what kind of learning, I enjoy working in groups and like most school work.”

She does however “completely disagree” with Saturday school as she finds it tiring and stressful. With tiredness comes less concentration, less work completed and a reduction in the desire to learn.

She believes that it is important to enjoy all lessons as she is less likely to work and try hard in those she does not particularly like. Enjoyment, according to Briony is at least partially dependent upon the teacher and cites mathematics as an example:

“I feel that I’m learning more because I’m being taught better and being, it’s being explained to me so I understand it more and that’s why I’m not so stuck and so I just feel that if you don’t, if you’re not very good at a subject sometimes you don’t like it really (. . .) and so now I feel that . . . I’m getting better and so I’m liking it more.”

The teacher’s ability to control pupils in class may also affect enjoyment, although she later seems less certain about this. However, she certainly believes teacher control affects the amount of learning taking place and that she tries less in subjects where the teacher is perceived as being inadequate.

From her written article we glean that Briony aspires to further travelling in the future, this being both fun and a learning opportunity. She does not know yet what she hopes to be in terms of a career but will be seeking out an exciting job for as she tells us her ambition is:

“ . . . definitely not (to be) cooped up in an office!!”

In the more immediate future Briony is looking forward to her next year at school when she believes there will be an opportunity to be more independent as well as to make more friends as additional children enter the year group. Friendship and family rank high in importance for Briony as she writes:

“I think your friends and family are very important as they support you when you are sad and make you laugh and be happy.”

This theme of the importance of friendship is picked up again in the first interview when I make an observation that she wrote in her article that she thinks people can learn from playing sport in the form of learning about teamwork.

Briony: . . . You learn to work together in a team (. . .) and I think that you work in a team and it's just as important as learning that as . . . or history or something . . .

NA: Why is it as important as history, academic subjects?

Briony: Well I think that if you don't learn to work together, say you're really really good at maths but you haven't learned to work with other people and socialise then . . . you won't get anywhere . . . you won't enjoy it . . . I just feel that . . . it's much more important to have friends and to . . . work together

She returns to this theme later in the interview when she is describing how she thinks her peers, rather than her close friends would characterise her in terms of ability:

"I think that they think of me that I'm . . . quite kind of laid back and nice to go out with or something (. . .) I think they think that I'm quite fun kind of . . . have like good ideas of what we could do . . . suggestions. I can work well in a group."

And again, when she talks about the importance of learning so personality and social skills once more take precedence:

Briony: I think family and friends are the most important (things in your life) (. . .) as you can talk to them . . . but also . . . I mean you could rely on something to help through life I suppose but that's not really my idea, but you could, if you were a different person and say you (were) really clever but didn't have so much of a personality (. . .) or didn't socialise so much then you could rely on . . . your gift . . .

NA: How important is learning to you?

Briony: . . . Quite, it depends what kind of learning really because I think that you learn in a group . . . and learning to work together is more important than learning academic subjects like history and geography . . . even though they are important to learn too ( . . . ) but I think that . . . learning to be with groups [whispers] is more important

I ask her what would switch her on to learning. She replies:

“I think if you learn more and you go to group activities then you get to know more people and have kind of more friends and lots of different friends ( . . . ) and it gets you involved in lots more things.”

On the purpose of learning she comments:

“ . . . to help you through life. Well school is to help you get a good job really and help you and also it’s to help you socialise more as well . . . and make new friends.”

Briony’s definition of learning goes beyond the academic. She sees it as social but she also sees it as:

“ . . . I think you learn everything ( . . . ) because learning and doing you’re learning something new . . . I’m just thinking . . . I think you learn whatever you do ( . . . ) I think whatever you do . . . you do learn something ( . . . ) even if it is something like riding which people don’t think . . . really . . . that much about ( . . . ) I think people keep on learning. You learn something different every day and you learn . . . new activities ( . . . ) you’ll never stop learning.”

She is also aware that there are different types of learning so that she identifies learning in maths as being of a different nature to learning in art. Similarly she regards ability differently dependent on the context. In English she describes herself as good at writing creatively which is reliant on imagination, but only average or not so good at spelling and punctuation. In music she is good at playing instruments but not so good at theory. In

considering her own ability she makes her judgements on other people's opinions and on exam results. However she adds:

“... exams aren't that trustworthy as ... you can feel ... cos in the exam you might not do as well as you really are (...) at that subject because you ... might get nervous (whispers) or something.”

Briony does not think everyone is equally able. She believes some people have a “gift” in some subjects such as art, music, design and technology and, perhaps information technology. However for some subjects, and she gives as her example, mathematics, she believes it is possible to learn and so people are able to have equal ability in such subjects. When asked to consider why some people may be gifted she replies:

“Well maybe it goes down in their family, their mum had a gift or their dad had a gift in that subject and it would just go down through the family and ... I'm not really sure how you get a gift [laughs] (...) And I think it's not from the amount of practising you do. I think if you practice hard at a subject like maths then you will get really high marks but maybe if you practice really hard at art you wouldn't get as high marks as a person with an (...) actual gift.”

This notion of ability and effort being linked, at least in some subjects, reappears when she is telling me about what she thinks her parents think her abilities are:

“Well I think all families think their children are ... the best and I think my family think ... that if I try hard then they think that (...) you can always achieve, if you try really hard. Say if you're not good at science and you try really hard because you want to be a vet (...) if you tried really then you would achieve it.”

It is interesting to note Briony's comment that she thinks she is more likely to put in additional effort for subjects she likes such as art, in order to attain higher marks, whereas:

“... if we’re doing something that I’m not particularly interested in then I don’t try as hard cos I wouldn’t really care what mark (. . .) I would get as I’m not that interested in . . . kind of . . . that particular subject . . . so maybe I don’t try as hard.”

Other data collected in the first interview shows Briony to claim to believe that her close friends probably see her as about the same standard as themselves, although some friends will be higher academically, while she thinks some may see her as more able at other subjects such as art and sport. When asked what view she thinks teachers hold of her ability she suggests that for art and design and technology they may see her as quite able and that she is able to “work sensibly”.

Briony enjoys a number of subjects at school including art, geography and theology. She especially enjoys imaginative art work but is less keen to learn about still life drawings. In geography she is less interested in topics such as learning about the weather, but finds interesting those in which she can learn about what is going on in the world. In both art and geography she talks of liking the teachers who give the class “fun activities” to do and gives as an example:

“... not so very long ago we did a project on population. I mean we had to make something and you could go with partners which I enjoy because you can do something creative and . . . so we just made something creative. That’s why it was in geography, you can also do kind of creative stuff as well.”

On the other hand she does not enjoy those activities that consist of exercises to be performed alone. She believes that more can be learned from group discussions as you are able to benefit from other people’s opinions whereas, solo exercises only reflect your own point of view.

Her thoughts on her future include the possibility of going to university to continue learning about subjects she likes. Although she holds a position of low academic status within her school, this does not deter her from considering higher education as within her

grasp. Does the “wisdom of the class” (Lauder and Hughes, 1999) allow her this aspiration where others would be working within a quite different frame of reference?

Her career beyond that has yet to be planned though she has been interested in the idea of design. However, she is unsure about this as most design now involves working with computers and she hates the idea of doing this. More generally she would describe a ‘good job’ as:

“... something that you enjoy personally and that you would ... money as well depends ... but I think it’s mainly if you enjoy your job say if you’re a ... doctor and you enjoy it then I think that’s really a good job or ... say a ... lawyer or ... anything like that.”

Briony believes her parents would maybe like her to get a good job as well as to enjoy life and not to waste her life “doing kind of silly things like ... putting myself in danger”. She believes that they see education as important as they have sent her to a good school so she can get a good education for learning once she has left school.

In response to the request ‘Tell me about comments that have been made about your work’, at the start of the second interview, Briony relates that most are either well done or try a bit harder. However she expands on this that her response to a request to try harder may be affected by whether or not she likes the subject and/or the teacher. As an example she cites Latin as a subject into which she puts less effort than she does for subjects such as art and English. This, she says, is not because of the Latin teacher but because the subject is complicated and confusing and, in any case it is a “dead language” that she will not be continuing to study and will not be useful to her, although she points out, for those wishing to become doctors it may have an instrumental value. Briony would be disappointed if she liked the subject, worked really hard to achieve in it and then received a low mark but in subjects that she doesn’t like she wouldn’t mind a low mark as she would not be taking these subjects further and so the results are not essential. Briony highlights the circular nature of enjoyment, ability and effort when she says:



"I normally like subjects that I'm good at normally . . . if you get good marks then you normally try harder so you normally like it and the teacher."

She describes her results as average, usually gaining marks in the seventies. However she qualifies her results in internal school examinations:

" . . . we have exams next week but I don't actually think they're that important so I wouldn't, I'm not revising as hard as I would be for my GCSEs or anything. I don't really mind."

Of the purpose of tests Briony comments:

Briony: They're for you to see to improve and to . . . to challenge yourself on your like terms work

NA: So how do they make you challenge yourself?

Briony: Well you revise for them so, say for your GCSEs you revise for them challenging you to see how much work you actually do through all the work you've done at the end

NA: And what about the internal tests, are they to challenge you as well?

Briony: Yeah but not so much really. They're just tests to see how the teachers think you're doing and how you're getting on in the class, see if you're in the right class

NA: So the internal ones are more for the teachers or are they for you as well?

Briony: I think they're more for the teachers maybe

Key Stage tests on the other hand, Briony views as being:

"To see how the teacher is teaching you. It's not really, that's why the government does it, to see if the teachers are teaching, say if one class got all one (low grade) in everything then they'd, the teacher wouldn't be very . . . it wouldn't be very good on the teacher really."

Interestingly, Briony also translates Key Stage results as level three being average, unlike the assumption being made across these case studies, that level four is regarded as the norm. For her level four, the result she says she gained in English and science, she describes as “average just above average”.

Briony tells me that in the first term of the last year of Key Stage 3, she is positioned in set two for French, Spanish and Latin while for maths and music she is in set three. I ask Briony how she would feel about going into set one from set two. She replies:

“ . . . In Spanish I wouldn’t mind going into set one. I wouldn’t mind I don’t think. I’d find it much harder . . . I think they’re about the same kind of but in maths I don’t think I would cos they work at a quicker pace and I don’t think I’d really like it . . . and I don’t think I would in Latin either and I don’t like the teacher I don’t think anyway.”

I wonder how she feels about being in set three for maths. She tells me:

Briony: I like it . . . I wouldn’t like to be in set two because partly because I have friends who were in set two and they moved down to the set three because they didn’t really like it and they . . . didn’t feel they were learning anything and so I wouldn’t really like it.

NA: Why did they think they weren’t learning?

Briony: Well they just said the teacher just wrote stuff down on the board and they just couldn’t keep up . . . they didn’t really understand how he taught them

For Briony then, friends feedback is important in the construction of her ‘knowledge’. This reflects Ball et al’s (1999) notion that “hot knowledge”, that is first or second hand experiential knowledge of friends, may be more important than “cold knowledge” or “official knowledge” available from books or from parents.

In terms of teaching and learning styles, Briony believes discussions are helpful to learning as they may “stick in your mind”. Videos also may help to make learning more memorable. I ask her to consider what might not be so helpful to learning:

- Briony: I think . . . writing from the board can be quite good cos you can, when you revise for exams, you can just read it through and it's all laid out but at the time it doesn't really stick in your mind and so you need something to really stick in your mind at the time so you remember it
- NA: So you quite like writing some things down?
- Briony: Yeah but that doesn't really stick in your mind so it's better to do other things as well maybe . . .
- NA: But actually copying doesn't stick in your mind?
- Briony: No but if you read it through for exams I think it would, it's just at the time

Asked whether she prefers to work alone or in groups and whether she thinks the working arrangements affects how much is learned, Briony responds:

“Well when we do projects I like working in pairs or groups cos you can share out the work and you don't have to do so much work but you can also learn from the stuff that you're doing . . . I prefer working in smallish groups but I wouldn't mind working on my own (. . .) if you have to go with some people who . . . aren't going to do any work and you're going to have to do the work then you don't probably learn more because you'd be doing, but if you had to share it evenly then you'd learn what you were doing.”

The final part of the second interview encouraged Briony to reflect on what she would like to learn about if she was given a free choice of options for her lessons in Key Stage 4. She somewhat uncertainly selected Spanish, art, design and technology, drama, English literature and biology adding later that she also likes geography and history and would wish to continue with these subjects too. In addition she thinks that she might like to take Business Studies. As she does not know what the options are going to be and does not

know what Business Studies will be like, because she hasn't taken the subject up to this time, she is unsure about its selection, but thinks that it is a qualification required for a lot of jobs and it may, therefore be quite useful. Her reasons for selecting the other subjects are a mixture of the intrinsic, as we have seen for history and geography, and through her statement that "they're just what I like really", to the instrumental as in the case of languages:

"I'd like to do one language, one or two languages because I think it's really important to know at least one (. . .) well it's not really important but I think it's nice to know a language (. . .) it's good to know German because of . . . there are lots of businesses do German."

This selection may also reflect her father's history as Sales Director who has travelled the world as part of his job, and has on occasions taken Briony with him.

She would, if she could, remove Latin from the timetable although she says she doesn't really dislike the subject, but would not choose to continue it. Maths and physics would probably also not be selected for, as she says:

"Well physics is kind of like maths. It's all like figures and stuff so I don't like doing it. I'm not very good at that . . . I'm not very good at maths and I don't really like it but I wouldn't like it anyway I don't think. I suppose actually, no maybe I would but I don't know because I'm not like that good . . . if I liked it, like if I was good at it then I might like it because it would be easy for me then (. . .) physics is like maths really. It's got mathematically things."

By the third interview, conducted almost eight months later, Briony continues to discount maths as an area of long-term interest to her as we talk about the usefulness of learning certain aspects of mathematics. In her response below, Briony is talking about Pythagoras theorem:

“Cos it’s used quite often to find the triangle, a right angle triangle so it’s kind of . . . perhaps it’ll be useful [laughs] I don’t know . . . if you’re going to be a mathematician, but . . . yeah, but that doesn’t really apply to me cos like you know I never will [laughs].”

A similar reply is made to the purpose of learning about area and she concludes, on being asked why she has to learn about these topics if they are not going to be useful:

“Because we have to [laughs] (. . .) because that’s what we’re taught in lessons and they’re going to be in exams so we have to learn about it if we want to do well.”

While Briony’s socio-economic background differs in position from that of male, working class children, her response is similar to that of Brown’s (1987) ‘ordinary kids’. These ‘ordinary kids’, Brown claimed, view schooling as a means to ‘getting on’, that is, gaining a ‘decent’ job. Their compliance with school rules does not itself show agreement or conformity with the school culture, but is because they view school as a means to an end.

Briony considers different types of learning. In maths, she says, imagination is not required as the method is “set”, but a task at an outdoor activity centre, for instance, crossing a river without getting wet, requires you:

“. . . to be imaginative cos you have to think of ways in which you can get across the river . . . so it isn’t like a subject but it’s (. . .) another totally different way of learning (. . .) learning to work as teams . . . and it’s just as important as learning a subject.”

Imagination is also used in English and art but this, Briony believes, is not really learning as:

“You can’t learn to be an artist . . . or DT (design and technology) or English you can’t learn how to (. . .) If you’re good at it then you can but in maths and stuff you can learn

and you can become good at it but in those subjects you can't. If you're not good at art then you can't really become . . . good. You can't really learn how to."

Towards the end of the interview I ask Briony if there is anything she would like to do but thinks she is not able to do. She responds:

"Yeah being a vet cos I love animals but I'm not really good at science . . . and you have to do a lot of science, like get A-levels. You have to get a good ( . . ) mark in science like A's and I don't think I'll ever do that, to qualify."

When asked if she thinks she could do anything in order to gain the required proficiency she answers doubtfully:

"Well perhaps, I'm not sure."

I explore with Briony her thoughts on how she likes to learn and what helps her most to learn. At the end of Key Stage 3 she likes to think and to write and finds it helpful to learn through a process of reading, then writing notes without looking up what she has just read, followed by looking up and reading again, that which she finds difficult. An activity she does not like as a means of learning she begins to say is problem solving, but she amends this to some mathematical style problems as she likes, and is quite good at, solving the sorts of problems posed at outdoor activity centres. Whether she likes the learning activity or not, Briony believes she learns from all of them.

In Key Stage 4 Briony has elected to take Spanish, design and technology, drama and geography, making her selection on the grounds of enjoyment and perceived ability. By the end of Year 11 she wants:

". . . to know enough for the exams, to have revised hard enough to know ( . . ) to do well ( . . ) getting good marks ( . . ) a B or an A, A\* I suppose."

However because there are some subjects she “knows” she is not so competent in she “knows” she will get some Cs and maybe a D. To try to ensure that she does not get Cs and Ds she says she would revise more, to ensure understanding. But there is a slight uncertainty about whether she believes this will bring about the desired A and B grades.

Briony remains unsure about what she would like to do in the future saying she has:

“... had on and off things that I’ve wanted to do but at the moment ... like I’ve changed. First of all like I want to be a vet and then I wanted to be a TV presenter but I’ve changed those as well like.”

However she is clear about her medium term future, which she envisions as taking AS and A-levels possibly in design and technology, drama, geography and Spanish; following this with a gap year; and then going to university.

I ask her why she would go to university and she tells me:

“Cos I’m not really sure what I want to do so I can just go straight on to my degree and do something after that.”

### **Continuity and Change: The Complexity**

Reading through the data collected from and of Briony, there is a continuity of thinking across several themes. Firstly there is an image of creativity interwoven across the months whether this be in the form of her alleged love of arts and crafts, creative writing, an interest in design or imaginative problem solving in outdoor challenges. I am reminded of the work of Sternberg (1990b) and his theory of intellectual styles.

Secondly, there is an enduring theme of sociability. Again this takes several forms: the desire to meet new people and make new friends through the school environment; the stated belief that learning to work in teams is as important as being learned; a preference for working in small groups; and learning through discussion. For Briony learning, or at

least education, is not only about gathering the academic credentials to ensure future employability but is also to provide social experiences.

A third continuity in Briony's story is her folk theory about ability in so much as she makes sense of the differences in ability that she perceives to exist through a complex web of natural and nurtured causes. By differentiating between those subjects in which ability is seen as a "gift" and those where ability can be learned through effort, Briony appears to see abilities as both fixed and variable. There is some slight sign, however, that she is becoming less sure that abilities can in fact be changed in certain subjects purely by effort in her comments regarding science and her hopes of becoming a vet.

In terms of future, Briony changes little across the time span in so much as she continues to have little concrete idea of the direction she would like her future to take with regard to career, but her notion that she will attend university has, if anything, become more resolute. In the shorter term, few changes were made to her option choices between early and late Year 9, although the structure of the actual options has resulted in fewer subjects being specified. Biology and English literature will both be studied by Briony, as these are not optional to the pupils. Her choice of design and technology and geography both seem to stem from interests mentioned in Year 8 while Spanish and drama were both on her 'wish list' at the start of Year 9.

Teaching and learning style preferences, although continuing to include the active and social, have, by the end of Key Stage 3 begun also to resonate with the discourse of examinations, so that copying and note taking may be moving to a higher position as Briony increasingly sees its usefulness in helping her revise for tests.

### **Creating Theory from Complexity**

What sense can be made from the individual complexities of these three 'average' girls and their enduring thoughts and mutating notions about learning, teaching and assessment? How does it impact on the girls' social construction of their ability and aspirations?



Drawing on some of the body of knowledge that exists, I now turn to exploring how these stories may help us understand both the complexities of the individual and the multiple complexity of the girls as 'Level Fours'.

### *Similarities and Difference*

I introduced the case studies as those of three 'average' girls, that is, three girls who, at the age of eleven had achieved the government's 'expected' grades in at least two of the three core subjects areas. In educational terms, at the start of their secondary education the girls had all achieved broadly the same level of attainment. They were not high fliers but neither were they failing to achieve the standards deemed acceptable and necessary by the government. Not only did they meet the required level at the end of Key Stage 2 but they also all described themselves as young people generally enjoying education. Additionally, all three girls spoke of their 'more able' friends or peers. In their educational reports there appeared no hint of anything other than perhaps a few very minor skirmishes with the rules of the school, perhaps a little too much talking here, a plea for more concentration there, and, in one case a reminder of the rules on jewellery and make-up. They all portray themselves and are portrayed as hard working, conscientious students. They appear largely conformist, with not only an acceptable level of achievement but also the attitudes required of them in educational policy rhetoric. They are a normative group, yet there are differences.

Of the variations between the girls three are to be explored here: their different responses to their average position, familial support and potential influence and the students' aspirations for the future.

### **Being Average**

Each girl, by standardised testing has been measured and judged to be 'at the expected level' or 'average' yet the girls appear to have responded to this position in quite different ways. Rachel seems generally to be unperturbed by being average except for a comment regarding her ascension into a higher set when she worried that she may not be able to

keep up and the sense of disappointment she might feel if she fell below 'average'. Isla feels she has to learn to accept individual difference and makes more mention of concern about the position in which she finds herself, while Briony has enveloped herself in a cocoon of 'alternative abilities'.

How might these differences be accounted for? With Bourdieu's notions of fields, capitals and habitus in mind, and considering the girls' relative positions in the social, economic and educational fields, it can be shown that at least part of the difference in their responses may be intricately linked to their existing place in the world as well as to their histories. Of course, this can only be a tentative suggestion, based as it is on so few cases, but it raises awareness to the possibilities of explaining difference within category, in this case the category of 'ability'.

Rachel is the oldest of two children in a working class family. Her parents appear to have little history of further education and no history of higher education, nor does she talk about others within the family as having experience of either further or higher education. She herself is regarded relatively highly both in her secondary school and, as far as the small amount of data available reveals, in primary school also. For those subjects that are setted, Rachel appears to be in set one for geography, history and technology and in set two for maths and science. She regards these as quite good sets. It would seem reasonable to position Rachel in a high/intermediate place within the school. In her world, both at home and at school it may be inferred that in terms of ability Rachel holds a relatively high position, yet she recognises also that some, including her friend, hold a higher position in the space that is academic ability. She does not have copious amounts of cultural capital to draw on in terms of knowledge of further education from within the family to question her position. Within the school environment that Rachel occupies, her 'cultural capital' appears 'normal', 'average' or above especially when considering her apparently positive attitude toward education and teachers positive images of her. As her stated desired position is to be at least average then her current place is likely to prove acceptable to her. She can maintain this by some effort but does not strive necessarily to improve her

position. Her disposition to learn on grounds of ability is one of maintenance though she is pleased if she achieves beyond this.

Isla is the second child in a family of four. From the data available it is not possible to position Isla on grounds of ability within her siblings although we know that her older sister has not achieved well enough to progress to the sixth form. There is some history of higher education available to Isla through her mother's experiences and possibly also those of her father, providing Isla with a source of cultural capital not apparently available to Rachel. Isla has attended a rural primary school where she has had additional aid in learning implying a need to bolster her cultural capital within the environs of that particular primary. Without further details it is not possible to know whether Isla's learning needs were any greater than those of Rachel. Folk theory might have us question whether there are differential values placed upon a level of 'ability' dependent upon the corporate culture of the school and, perhaps, its locality. At secondary school, Isla is in a broader range of sets: set one for geography and German, set two for history and set three for maths and science. There is a symbolic reality that she has not achieved 'average' in all curriculum areas, yet her standardised test results might tell us otherwise. In the mind of Isla there is also a symbolic reality of her difference in the behaviours of the teachers towards her, whether or not these would be perceived by others as they are by Isla. The cultural capital available within her home life may provide Isla with a greater knowledge of the potential field of ability yet rather than it acting in a beneficial way, it may in fact be drawn upon to undermine Isla's perceptions of her own abilities and linked with the cultural capital provided by the school environments she has been exposed to may powerfully add to Isla's dis-positioning of herself from an acceptable position in the space of ability. Isla wants to do better, to improve. Unlike Rachel she seems less content with her 'average' place yet she also admits to periods of lack of effort or concentration. She talks of being afraid to try to achieve in areas she perceives herself less capable, saying that this is because of her shyness and ease of embarrassment. Yet she also talks of her fear of ignorance as a drive to want to learn. Theories of personality such as those described by McCrae and Costa (1984) may be used to explain her feelings but so too might the 'expected' levels of capital within her culture. There is a history of a level of

academic ability within her family at her parents' generation, though not yet at Isla's own – at least within the immediate family. In order to maintain the level, Isla's generation needs to achieve a higher level than that required by Rachel to at least maintain Rachel's family's standing. In order to 'stand still' in position, Isla has a greater pressure to achieve more than would be expected of Rachel. It is not possible to know whether Isla's desire to succeed and her apparent fear of failure can justifiably be linked to an inherent personality trait or her social position, both or even neither, but it is possible to conjecture the feasibility that her capital resources available to her both in the home and at school may at least play part in her reaction to her position. Certainly the notion that her social position may be a factor in her reactions would go some way to explain the contradictions apparent between the work of Dweck (1986; 2000) and that of Phillips and Zimmerman (1990), whereby some students appear to use their fear of failure and low self perceptions to create a driving force to work all the harder, rather than, as Dweck suggests, to give up on learning. If a student is attempting to maintain a higher position that is historically regarded as their own they may fear failure when they perceive themselves as unlikely to achieve this aim, yet they may also feel keenly the desire to attempt to raise their achievements to the requisite level hence the added effort. Rachel's minimum position of maintenance may be lower than that of Isla's and thus, she will have no such fear, nor yet the drive.

But Rachel, although appearing to have lower expectations than Isla, does want to improve her occupational position from that of her mother and is aware that this will require the acquisition of credentials. As more people from traditionally lower positions crowd into the credentials arena, so the pressure must increase on those already there to achieve more in order to maintain their place. If Isla drops her guard and slides down the positional ladder Rachel may step in to fill the vacated place. Additional 'costs' are incurred by Isla as she participates in the positional competition (Hirsch, 1977).

Briony has two older stepsisters: one has continued into higher education; of the other's educational achievements we know nothing. At least one of her parents can provide higher educational cultural capital, while other cultural capital has undoubtedly been

acquired and is available as a resource for Briony through her father's work and the family's travels. The careers of her parents and the fact that she is paid for to attend a private school may lead us to assume that there is considerable economic capital available to Briony, although this cannot be borne out other than through inference. Like Isla, for Briony to maintain the family position she will be required to achieve more than Rachel, yet Briony seems less concerned by her 'average' level than Isla. Briony somehow appears to have determined that there is more capital required for success than academic capital alone. She privileges the role of socialising and, although she wants to do well enough academically, she also seeks to increase her social connections. In order for Briony to maintain or improve her position from her family start point she not only recognises a need to maintain a level of academic competence but also assumes a need to acquire social skills and networks. By diluting the importance of the academic it may be possible for Briony to be less afraid of the consequences of her average ability even though academic ability is an important factor in remaining in her familial position of status.

### **The family**

Interwoven into the student's reactions to their ability is the family, so far discussed only in terms of the family's social standing. But the family, for all three girls seems to play a central part in their perceptions of learning more generally.

In the case of Rachel her mother is described as playing two roles in the development of her daughter's learner identity. Firstly, Rachel speaks of her mother's efforts from Rachel's infancy, to encourage her daughter in the basic skills of reading and arithmetic. Rachel believes that this may be unusual in some of the families of her peers and suggests the possible attribution of her level of ability to her mother's early work. But there may also be a symbolic value in the attention given to Rachel's academic development in so much as Rachel has seen time and effort being used to aid her development in learning and education thereby strengthening the perception of the importance of education in the mind of Rachel. Although Rachel's mum may not possess the cultural capital of the mothers of Isla and Briony, in terms of formal academic achievement, none-the-less, she uses those

capitals available to her to help her daughter succeed in maintaining or improving her social and/or economic position. A second role played by Rachel's mother in Rachel's learner identity comes in the form of aspirations. Her mother clearly hopes for more than maintenance of employment position, for she finds her own work tedious and would like to see her daughter gain something more from the work place. This thread will be returned to when looking at the differences in future aspirations of the three girls, but for now it is worth noting the familial influence this may have on Rachel's desire to achieve.

Isla's predominant source of parental influence in her learner identity appears to be her father although her mother, older sister and uncle also were mentioned through the course of meetings with Isla. The paternal influence seems to take two directions, firstly in his enthusiasm for Isla to attend university and secondly in his support for her perceived ability in languages, possibly a direct result of his own learning now regarded as necessary for his role in a multinational company. In both cases Isla seems unconvinced by his hopes. She will not be 'pushed' into accepting his values as her own, yet contrary to this she also wishes to please her parents. Whether Isla ultimately absorbs her father's attempts at transmitting his hopes on to her, only time will tell, but again there is likely to be a symbolic value in this encouragement in its persistence of highlighting the importance placed both on a university education and languages in order to maintain, or possibly improve position. There is a more direct role for the cultural capital of the father in language learning in his ability to help Isla practise her linguistic skills, and this practice is further enhanced by her uncle's skills in speaking French. For Isla, possibly unlike Rachel, she can draw on family academic capital beyond that required for the acquisition of basic skills. To Isla learning languages is not something out of the ordinary, but rather is a 'natural' part of her family's lives.

As well as her father and uncle, her mother also may be able to provide cultural capital for Isla, especially in her knowledge of higher education, making this a 'real' possibility for her daughter rather than the unknown dream it is likely to be for Rachel. Her mother's other role in her daughter's learner identity seems to be in her encouragement of the

spending of effort in order to achieve, although the transmission of this encouragement may not be sufficient in and of itself to prevent Isla 'drifting' in certain curriculum areas.

There is one further family member that should not be forgotten: the older sister, an apparent source of disappointment to the father, at least. We cannot know the effect that such a disappointment might play on the identity of a younger sibling, yet had the sister achieved her father's hopes, would Isla have felt so keenly the need to perform for and to please, her parents? Would the pressure to do so have been the same?

For Briony, the most obvious family influence is the expenditure of family economic resource to purchase a privileged education, yet this may not be the only resource that is in play in Briony's story of learning. Briony like Isla and unlike Rachel, has available to her certain cultural capitals; indeed the capitals described are possibly more wide ranging than those of her middle class counterpart, Isla. Briony is able to draw on the academic and employment experiences of her mother, and although we do not know the academic history of her father, we know that she has gained experiences of other cultures and believes herself to have learned from these experiences. From at least one of her two older step-sisters she can call upon academic capital and the very fact that there is an older sister studying in higher education means that for Briony this is not seen as something unique or unusual.

### **Future Aspirations**

All three girls have started their lives at secondary schools with the same – or at least similar – levels of academic achievement as measured by national standard tests. Their aspirations for the future however are not so uniform. Rachel's discourse, although including university as a possibility appears to infer this route as an outside chance rather than an almost certain probability. Isla, meanwhile, is unsure of her thinking about a career through university. While not discounting it, she none-the-less does not totally embrace it, and it seems that this pathway is more strongly connected to the dreams of her father than to Isla's own identity. Briony on the other hand sees university almost as a

foregone conclusion. There seems little doubt in her mind that this is her destiny in a few years time.

For Rachel her learning career pathway contains the discourse of higher education only in terms of its requirement for an employment career. If her ultimate choice of employment can be gained without recourse to university then the alternate route will be taken. Formal learning beyond compulsory education is however, within the remit of Rachel's aspirations creating an image of a girl housed in a room with a veiled ceiling and a concrete floor. She recognises that there may be situations that require rising above the veil, but she will only draw back the veil if she needs to, not because she particularly wants to. Her aspirations are to achieve acceptable results – grade Cs in her GCSEs – and to pursue a career in a 'decent' job. For her to do this she considers the financial resources she will require and talks of getting a part-time job while studying at college toward her ultimate job goal. There may be an intrinsic liking of education but it is all but drowned out by extrinsic, instrumental considerations.

In considering her ultimate employment pathway, Rachel has moved through the traditional working class image of potential employment opportunities: hairdresser, beautician, air hostess, office work and nursing, all likely to be permissible occupations to 'get on' (Brown, 1987) in the female working classes – although it may be argued that certain 'office work' and nursing were also a traditional area of employment for middle class girls and might thus be a way of 'getting out' of the class position of childhood. Only computer programming deviates from the traditional and is the career possibility Rachel names as possibly requiring university education. By the third interview, this option has been removed from her discourse.

By the third interview also, Rachel has selected her 'options' for her GCSEs, as much as the limitations of the National Curriculum allow her to do. Her selections are both intrinsic and instrumental. She has selected those she likes, art and food technology and that which she believes she needs for her espoused career choice of nursing and midwifery: GNVQ Health and Social Care. It is important to remember that midwifery



only appeared as a career possibility during the third interview; it is unlikely to have been a long held dream, nor yet is there any certainty that it will be an enduring goal for Rachel. Nevertheless, one of her choices of examination subjects reflects a perceived need to link that which she learns about to her future employment.

Had Rachel attended either the rural school or the private school in this study she would not have had the opportunity to study for a vocational qualification, only GCSEs being offered, save for, at the rural school, an alternative course for teacher selected pupils who had not achieved the 'expected' level four standard, or had not the behavioural or attitudinal competencies deemed necessary for a more academic route. In these schools Rachel may still have held her goal as nursing, but she would have been expected to take a more conventional route through academia to get there. Quite how this difference in structure may impact on Rachel's future, in terms of her as learner, her as employee and her herself cannot be gauged but, mindful of the work of Brown and Scase (1994); Reay (1998); Ball et al (1999); and Gillborn and Youdell (2000) the question of foreclosure into a broad range of occupational and educational possibilities through both structure and agency appears a strong possibility in the case of Rachel.

University may be a possibility for Isla as with Rachel, but in Isla's case the defining factor is not instrumental but based upon ability. If she gets the grades required she assumes she may go to university, although earlier in her learning career she seemed uncertain as to whether she would seek to continue into higher education. Unlike Rachel's parents, Isla's father at least, positively wants her to go to university. Rachel's parents do not debar the opportunity but, in Rachel's rendition of their hopes, are portrayed as neutral in their feelings towards progression into higher education for their daughter.

Isla's plans for her future employment have fluctuated through the course of the study having started with the possibility of becoming a chef to considering employment either as a child psychiatrist or police officer by the end of Year 9. She also alludes to the possibility of working abroad. There appears to be no long-standing commitment to a particular occupational route way yet her selection of courses for GCSE include two

possibly selected, at least partially, with employment in mind: child development and Spanish. The latter of these reflects her more enduring interest and high self-perception of ability in languages, itself potentially a product not only of her school results but also the cultural capital provided from within the family.

Briony's future is, in the medium term, more certain in her mind; from GCSEs she will progress through A-levels and a gap year to university. She gives no reason for wishing to continue into higher education other than that she has yet to decide what occupational pathway she wants to travel. For Briony, it is as a disposition, not to learn but to progress a route already drawn; it is a 'natural' progression. This is not to say that Briony is indisposed to learning; on the contrary, she claims, as does both Rachel and Isla, to enjoy participating in activities of education. Rather it is to suggest that she possess a disposition for further formal learning more out of habit or expectation due to place than of her intrinsic motivations to learn. In Briony's world, education has its place: to do enough to gain the grades to climb the next rung, aided and abetted by social connection and expertise.

Three 'Level Four' girls: graded and passed as of the 'expected' standard, yet with a little delving into their perceptions of learning, ability and aspirations we can begin to see how little does the level tell us of the learner as learner, only that they have learned enough to gain the grade. Of their dispositions to learn, the grades tell us nought. Rachel appears to be disposed to learn in order to maintain and possibly improve her position but only in order to get on within her class; Isla may be disposed to learn because of a desire to maintain a position already inhabited by her parents and a fear that she may not be able to succeed; and Briony's disposition to learn seems to be derived more from her position and the map that is on view to her, than from a strong desire to be or become academically more astute.

## **Chapter 12: Fostering dispositions to lifelong learning: learning from research**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter the strands of the research are drawn together to consider the extent to which education policy, as translated into practice, helps or hinders the creation of the conditions needed for a 'competence' approach to lifelong learning. I suggest possible implications of the findings in relation to the models of lifelong learning and the FORs that may be desirable, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 3 and consider these findings with those of other studies.

### **Frames of Reference: for competence or performance?**

#### *Introduction*

In this thesis four factors have been identified that are foundational in influencing lifelong learning: the concepts of learning that pupils hold; notions of what motivates an individual to want to learn; how pupils' understand and judge their own 'abilities'; and the socio-economic aspirations they have for their futures. For each of these factors, it has been argued, individuals hold 'frames of reference' (FORs), that is, ways of interpreting and making sense of what they learn, why and the progress, if any they think they have made at school. The FORs both shape and constrain how pupils' view their world. The notion of FORS is based on the adoption of the socio-cultural theory of learning developed by Pollard with Filer (1996) and described in Chapter 2. The focus for the thesis is on the interpretations pupils' say they make of the four factors, within a range of contexts, taking into account the positions held by the individual pupils' in the socio-cultural domain, using the work of Bourdieu, especially to aid analysis and interpretation.

In Chapter 3 I argued that current educational policy for secondary education in England is dominated by a discourse of 'economism' (Ball, 1999) and a 'factory model' of learning and suggested that by overemphasising one form of discourse and one model of learning other possible ways of perceiving the world may be lost. Broadfoot and Pollard (2000;

Pollard and Triggs, 2000) have developed, from the work of Bernstein, two contrastive models of education: the 'performance' model and the 'competence' model. The 'performance' model is akin to the 'factory model', in the discourse of economism. This, both they and I argue, is the model that frames educational policy in England at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Drawing on the literature reviewed for each of the factors, a different set of FORs form the basis for the 'competence' model of education. Thus, in the 'competence' model learning is likely to be viewed as the act of understanding; motivation is likely to be for intrinsic reward such as to understand more or to become more competent in, with students interested and actively engaged in the process; there is a belief in the individual's ability to develop ability and intelligence; assessments are formative, providing data on strengths and weaknesses, and highlighting where additional learning may be required; and there is likely to be a desire to continuously improve, with individual's setting and achieving their own goals on a continuous basis. By contrast, the 'performance' model incorporates a belief that learning is about the acquisition of facts and skills; that individual's are motivated by extrinsic reward; that there are limits to the amount of improvement that is possible in an individual as 'intelligence' is assumed to be fixed; tests are summative, measuring and grading pupils; and that aspirations will tend to be to do just enough to achieve goals whether these are set by the individual or by others.

### *Pupils' FORs and models of education*

#### **Pupils' views of their learning and motivation**

In this study it has been shown that pupils appear to have taken on board the prevalent discourse of educational policy, that formal learning is important because education is required to gain employment. The dominant FOR for 'learning' is one that assumes learning to be the acquisition of facts and skills in order to acquire credentials that can be traded for jobs. However, around half the pupils interviewed believed at least some learning provides them with competencies required in certain jobs. But, while policy makers assume there to be a link between this notion of the purpose of learning and motivation, pupils do not necessarily make such connections. In Year 8, only five pupils spoke of being motivated to learn by the thought of its usefulness in gaining future

employment. These included pupils regarded by teachers as 'problem' pupils. Pupils, at this stage of their learning careers, were much more likely to believe they were motivated to learn because they gained the intrinsic reward of enjoyment by doing so. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they hold a FOR supportive of a competence model of learning. 'Enjoyment' could be gained through working with friends; 'liking' the teacher; being allowed to draw rather than write; or because they gained favourable judgements about their work. In the case studies of the three 'average' girls given in Chapter 11, all three girls talk of enjoying at least some aspects of schooling but quite different stories emerge of the rewards they seek from participating in learning. Rachel, who tells us that she always 'tries her best', appears to place a ceiling on the amount of effort she is prepared to put in to improve. She is content with an 'average' position in terms of her educational achievements and, so long as this position is maintained, sees no reason to exert additional effort to rise higher. Isla is especially concerned with the favourable judgements of others and assumes she is less likely to be motivated when she receives negative comments, whether from peers or teachers. She is concerned, too, to gain favour from her parents and this seems to provide a driving force for her to try harder. Briony believes she exerts more effort in subjects she enjoys, that is, there is an element of intrinsic interest in her learning. In subjects she does not enjoy her attitude appears similar to that of Rachel, in so much as she is unconcerned by the results she achieves and is therefore not spurred on to try harder. In her mind she has already decided that such subjects will not form a part of her future.

By Year 9 enjoyment had become less dominant in the pupils' stories of motivation. It had been usurped by wanting to learn the knowledge and skills perceived to be required for future employment (about half the sample) or in order to gain credentials (just over half the sample) for gaining a place at university, especially in the case of middle class pupils, and/or a 'good' job. In Chapter 9 we saw that, while students assumed learning to be for earning, skills, future learning and life in general, it was learning for tests that dominated the stories. For pupils Year 9 had been a year when 'learning' was done for testing and the dominant view of the purpose of testing given by the pupils, is one of categorising and measuring rather than aiding learning. In the case of Key Stage 3 tests, although it was

recognised that it was individual pupil performance that was being awarded a 'level', for some students it was the teachers and the schools that were being measured. Only one pupil assumed that the Key Stage tests might be used formatively to help teachers understand where pupil strengths and weaknesses were. Tests, whether national, school, or class level, tended to be regarded by pupils as a summative activity. There were descriptions given of teachers speaking with the whole class about areas of weakness, but this was more likely to occur, according to the data available, if large numbers of pupils had made errors. Some pupils talked of advice being given by teachers to 'work harder' or concentrate more, advice not helpful in a 'competence' model of learning. The picture is however, more complex than this: for some students additional guidance has been given in the home, private tuition paid for, after school clubs used, additional tests taken and follow-up work completed to show that pupils have understood how to overcome their weaknesses.

#### **Pupils' Views of their Ability and Aspirations**

Pupils described the 'levels' they were awarded at the end of each Key Stage in terms of their positions in relation to the 'average'. There seemed to be no awareness of what the levels inferred about actually competencies in English, maths or science and still less awareness of what they might need to do in order to progress from their current position to a higher level. Pupils did, however, see levels being used to place them in ability groups or 'sets' and when asked to make judgements about their own abilities they frequently said they used the marks they received in tests to decide this for school activities. Interestingly for out-of-school activities, although pupils did use the comparisons with others and the comments made by others as ways of helping them determine their own abilities, they were also much more likely to also speak of the 'feeling' they had personally about their competence. Thus, Jenni, on commenting that she was good at swimming, explained, that she wasn't sure why she thought she was good as she hadn't 'grades', but that where once she was "very cautious around water", now she felt "quite confident". Felicity uses other peoples' comments to aid her judgement of her ability in out of school activities but she also uses how she "feels", for instance, if she feels "proud". Others spoke of 'knowing' when they were doing the activity well through experience or because they were actually

riding a horse or a bicycle successfully or played a piece of music in a way that made them feel they had played well.

How pupils' have reacted to the judgements made of them has been considered through the case studies in Chapter 11. Here it is shown that where Rachel (urban school, working class, high prior achievement within school), finds being 'average' an acceptable level, Isla (rural school, service class, 'average' prior achievement within school) believes she is regarded less favourably in the school, by teachers than her more able friends. She speaks of having 'learned' to 'come to terms' with her lower 'ability'. For Isla 'average' seems to be a problem. Briony (private school, service class, low prior achievement within school), having achieved 'expected levels of achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 like Rachel and Isla, is less concerned by her 'average' position than Isla. She believes that it is not only 'academic' ability that is a resource for future achievement but also social skills and networks. Her story is punctuated with this notion but she also begins to show an understanding that to achieve certain aspirations particular academic credentials are required. In Chapter 11 I argued that the different reactions of the girls' to 'being average' may be linked to their current socio-cultural positions as well as their histories. Each girl wanted to at least maintain their position but the position they hold currently means that for some girls this may be easier to do than for others. Being 'average' may be enough to maintain, or even improve a low position but higher positions may be perceived as requiring more than this if the position is to be held, still more so if improvement is sought.

Students reactions to perceived abilities may also be affected by the FOR they hold about the nature of 'intelligence'. Dweck (1986; 2000) suggests that those who believe intelligence to be fixed and who have low perceptions of their abilities may resort to learned helplessness or withdrawal assuming additional effort will not result in greater competence. In Chapter 8 Wendy's story highlights some of the complexities of the FORs held about intelligence, ability and motivation and illuminates possible constraints that FORs may create in determining aspirations and approaches to learning. Wendy believed herself to have a talent for artistry. This was supported by interactions with adults within

her family and at school. She was keen to follow a career using her skills in art and would like to be able to spend more time at school, becoming increasingly competent in this area. However in maths, in particular, her belief was that she was unable to improve. Of interest in Wendy's story is her belief in Year 8 that although some people may have "bigger abilities" everyone is able to learn, but some will require extra support to arrive at the same place. This apparent frame of reference of an incremental intelligence is offset by her comments of her being "rubbish" or "thick" at maths. Nevertheless, at this stage in her learning she does still seem to believe that, with effort, it is possible to improve. By Year 9 her faith in this belief seems to be on the wane. She still considered the possibility that additional effort may make a difference but any hope of her progressing, at least in maths, now appeared very slim. Recognising that in order to progress to art college, she will require a certain level of credentials in maths, she was beginning, toward the end of Year 9 to lose hope in her ability to achieve her desired long term career goal. Yet in Year 8, Wendy believed she felt motivated to learn by the prospect of achieving a 'good' job that both paid well and provided her with some enjoyment and personal fulfilment.

Nor is Wendy alone in aspiring to jobs that provide hope of an enjoyable as well as an affluent and secure future. The case studies of the four boys given in Chapter 10 provide a glimpse into the dreams of youths from similar socio-cultural backgrounds but with different levels of prior achievement. For the four urban school boys the preferred route to social mobility is through sport rather than academia, and where a lack of ability in sport was perceived to be a constraining factor, the hope of mobility through music became the preferred option. Out of school these boys were taking practical steps to improve their competence in their chosen areas. Kevin and Matthew belong to local football teams, Matthew having been selected to participate in a 'Centre of Excellence', spending at least part of their weekends practising and playing. Vince is keen to become a Formula One Driver and is spending time go-karting. It is unclear to what extent this is to build up skills and competence, and to what extent it is to acquire social networks that may aid him in achieving his dream. Edmond, recognising a 'limit' to his football skills, looked initially within sport for other careers. His perceived ability in English lead him initially to consider sports journalism but his interest in music and a chance opportunity to audition



for a 'boy bad' has caused him to shift his aspirations to the world of pop music. He already takes piano lessons out of school and plans to learn to play the guitar, seeking additional competences to aid achieve his dreams. Here boys from the urban school of 'working' and 'intermediate' class backgrounds, with a range of prior academic achievements seek ways of improving their lives through activities they enjoy and believe they have some skills in. Behaviourally and attitudinally these boys appear to range across Brown's 'rems', ordinary kids', and 'swots' but they differ in that they all hope to move out of their current socio-economic positions, but not by academic means.

The three case studies of the 'average' girls given in Chapter 11 provide a different view of pupils' aspirations. Here, the girls have all achieved, by the end of Key Stage 2, the same achievement level as measured by Key Stage 2 test results. They are largely conforming pupils and portray themselves as hard-working and conscientious. The girls, however, have different positions in socio-economic terms and in the schools attended. University is a possible aspiration for all three pupils but it is shown that how they view this route-way varies considerably and, I argue, this may, like the difference in reaction to being 'average', be as a result of their position in the socio-cultural domain. For Rachel (urban school, working class) university is a possibility only if it is a requirement for her chosen vocation. There is no driving force from within her or from her family for her to select higher education. Isla (rural school, service class), on the other hand, although uncertain as to whether she will attend university, recognises that at least her father wants this to be so. Isla, however is uncertain of her ability to achieve this goal. For Briony, university is not an option but a certainty. This does not mean that for Briony it is because she has any greater desire than the other two girls to improve her competence, but rather that it is a 'natural' expectation, a habit, a way of being. Gaining grades, making social connections, and, maybe gaining expertise, these are required to maintain and improve her familial position in the socio-cultural domain.

What this study highlights is that students do not simply hold frames of reference that support either a 'competence' model or a 'performance' model of learning but interpret the world of learning, both within and without schooling in a multiplex of ways. FORs held

by individual students do not always remain constant across time and contexts. Students struggle to make sense of the frames they hold. For instance pupils have clearly ‘learned’ an egalitarian view of ability but this mingles with an understanding that not everyone seems able to proceed at the same pace, not everyone appears to have the same ‘talents’, but all can try. However, where effort is perceived as having resulted in little or no progress, individuals re-interpret their ‘knowledge’ of intelligence and make sense in their own ways. Given William’s high position in both socio-economic and academic achievement terms it may not be so surprising that he can hold a ‘fixed’ theory of intelligence as his FOR *and* believe that:

“If I wasn’t able to do something I would go away and learn how to do it, or if I couldn’t do it for some other reason I would just think that’s life . . .” (William, private school, Year 9)

Nor is it surprising that Katy, a high achieving pupil at the rural school, with a belief that ‘ability’ is malleable, and can be improved with effort, should suspect that a friend, who has difficulty with aspects of academic work, does not try as hard as she could. Flo, a low achieving pupil also attending the rural school, sees things quite differently. She finds it distressing that some teachers believe she is not trying or concentrating when she herself ‘knows’ it is because she is trying very hard but cannot understand. Such a tension is exacerbated by the ‘performance’ model which emphasises summative assessment rather than formative development.

Students in this study generally spoke of hopes for the future that, for those in intermediate or service class positions would at least maintain their place, and for those whose parents had occupations and educational histories that categorise them ‘working class’, would provide upward mobility. But for the four intermediate and working class boys at the urban school, their preferred route to social mobility was not through academic performance or competence but through sport and music; high profile occupations that are portrayed with particular lifestyles, perhaps, as Bourdieu (1993) has suggested, “the only recognized route to wealth and fame”. Matthew’s story, in Chapter 10, suggests perceived

‘enjoyment’, too, for Matthew has as part of his FOR, a knowledge of his high academic achievements and his ability in maths that may provide him with the mobility his parents want for him. Yet he has no particular interest to become more competent in maths other than that, should he fail to attain his football dreams, it may provide him with a route to a job in accountancy that “pays well but it’s a bit boring” (Matthew, late Year 9). Matthew and Kevin *do* have aspirations to become competent, they spend part of their out-of-school time, working towards this; so too Edmond with music and Vince with driving skills. Wendy *does* want to improve her abilities in art; she’d like to be able to understand maths, too and she *has* received the message that competence in maths is not only important for gaining entry into art college but is a useful ‘life skill’ too. Darren, a low achieving urban school pupil, and Kelly, a low achieving rural school pupil, *know* they would like A and B grades at GCSE, even if Kelly does go on to add that “I’m only dreaming”. ‘Competence’ and ‘performance’ intricately entwine in the minds of the pupils, and while it is the latter that, in general, seems to dominate, strands of FORs supportive of a competence model of learning, if not always of formal education, are woven through the pupils’ stories. However, being ‘competent’ in the ‘competence’ model is not just about being able to play football or music. It is about having an intrinsic interest *and* a deep desire to master the activity or domain of knowledge. From the data gathered in this study it remains unclear the extent to which the boys’ interests are matched by a drive to improve and to master. But in having an interest, they are one step closer to ‘competence’ than ‘performing’: learning by rote to pass an exam.

**To what extent does education policy, as translated into practice, help or hinder, the creation of the conditions needed for a ‘competence’ approach to lifelong learning?**

It has been argued that recent education policy in England has adopted a ‘performance’ model of education and that in so doing may, unintentionally, be undermining the development of an orientation toward a ‘competence’ model of learning amongst primary age pupils (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000; Pollard and Triggs, 2000). In this thesis, it has been shown that the FORs held by the twenty-five young people interviewed during Key Stage 3, in the second and third years of their secondary education, are highly complex.

But there appears to be some tendency towards these students possessing FORs that more readily support a 'performance' model of education than one of 'competence'. The young people are more likely to view learning as the acquisition of facts and skills at a 'surface' level, than that it is about being deeply involved in understanding. Students do believe in the value of intrinsic reward in terms of enjoyment as a motivating factor, but they do not necessarily link this with a desire to understand more or become more competent.

Enjoyment may mean many things to different children. As the pupils moved through Year 9, they increasingly saw learning in terms of testing rather than for intrinsic reward and this may have been as a direct result of the structuring of their learning in the classroom in preparation for their end of Key Stage 3 tests, taken late in Year 9. Teachers and pupils spoke of the heavy emphasis placed on just such preparation, in the teachers' case, often to the detriment of attempting to foster an interest in the subject. Thus, for example, a maths teacher at the rural school speaks of "teaching towards the SATs exams very very much so" while also believing that he no longer is able to afford the time to "kindle an interest". Likewise, a science teacher at the same school talks of the difficulty in striking the right balance between "sparking an interest" and "covering the content". Matthew, a pupil at the urban school, when asked about what he had learned in Year 9 talks of "concentrating on what we're going to do in SATs". Pupils made sense of learning as a means to gain particular credentials to trade for jobs. Pupils in general saw tests as a summative process, grading and categorising them, showing them their academic place, rather than as a part of a learning process, where assessment is used formatively to highlight strengths and weaknesses providing teachers and pupils with data about where additional learning support may be required. They spoke of the 'levels' not in terms of learning competencies that they have, or have yet to acquire, but in terms of 'averages' and norms; of a hierarchical positioning, of a place. Although the students generally began by talking of everyone being equally able and of the developmental nature of intelligence, as time progressed, so too did some of their beliefs. Especially among those students holding lower academic positions, there became a growing belief that effort may not result in achievement in certain areas of learning. This, some began to see, would result in restrictions on their future aspirations, blocking pathways to particular careers. Where other envisaged avenues remain open, this may not be problematic, but for students like

Wendy, the hopelessness of her situation seems almost tangible, the more so in recalling the body language and tone of voice that cannot be captured on the written page.

Is this the result of educational policy, as translated into practice? This thesis suggests a myriad of influences that work in conjunction to shape and constrain the interpretations pupils do and are able to make about their world. Educational policy, filtered as it is by the time it reaches the pupils, is only one such influence. Pupils learn from their parents, their siblings and from broader family and community contacts available to them. They acquire possible ways of seeing the world through interaction with their peers and through the media. Through their own interpretations of this multitude of frames of reference they struggle to create their own ways of understanding, of making sense of who they are as learners and what learning means for them. Yet education policy is *an* important influence. The incessant concern with measurement and positioning, with 'levels', and 'targets', with 'success' and 'failure' whether of pupils, teachers, schools, or local authorities, brings with it particular frames of reference, sets them in the public domain, infiltrates the thinking of individuals, and helps to shape and constrain the FORs of pupils. Education policy does not necessarily prevent pupils holding FORs that are supportive of a 'competence' model of education. But the emphasis is on grading and sorting instead of developing understanding. It transmits a narrow 'performance' model of education that appears to increasingly infiltrate the views of pupils. In terms of dispositions to lifelong learning does this matter?

### **'Competence', 'performance' and lifelong learning**

In Chapter 1 four conceptualisations of lifelong learning were described. Lifelong learning could be viewed to be for economic progress, personal development, social inclusion and democracy, and for social control. I argued that the ideal dispositions required for each of these models varied so that for the development of a supply of labour able to support a 'high skills' economy individuals might need to be reflexive, decisional and creative, whereas for a low skills economy they would need to be repetitive and imitative (Strain, 1998). For either form of economy, given the assumed lack of security

and stability of employment in a global economy, individuals would need to be able to find ways to maintain their self-confidence and self-esteem, even during periods of unemployment. Critical intelligence (Coffield, 2002) and a willingness to be involved and speak out in the public sphere (Strain, 2000) may be dispositions required for lifelong learning to support democracy. But if lifelong learning is about social control, conformity to “normative expectations” (Coffield, 1999a) and compliance rather than critical intelligence is the disposition required? However, it is the dispositions required for personal development, I have argued, that lie at the heart of government rhetoric. These are the tendency to enjoy learning for its own sake, a desire to master knowledge and skills rather than perform for external reward, and a drive towards wanting to make sense of personal experiences. Such learners will be committed to self-improvement and will have the confidence and self-esteem to be self-directed and independent (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000; Bagnall, 2001) as well as a critical understanding of their own identities as learners and of the learning process and what it means to learn (Quicke, 1999; Rees et al., 1997). In other words, the dispositions required to support a ‘competence’ model of education. Yet as has been shown in this thesis, the rhetoric of personal development and the associated frames of reference that form a part of the language of education policy (DfEE 1997; 1998) is subjugated by the policies and FORs of ‘performance’ by which people and institutions are to be held accountable.

Dispositions are situated and contextual (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Sadler, 2002; Katz, 2002), volatile and uncertain (Sadler, 2002). But while each new learning episode throughout life will be interpreted in the time and context of its occurrence, if a socio-cultural theory such as that developed by Pollard with Filer (1996) is assumed, then the FORs promulgated in the socio-cultural domain, including those reiterated through education policy are likely to play an important part in the way individuals approach lifelong learning. If the normative frameworks and assumptions for making sense (Pollard with Filer, 1996) of learning are those FORs associated with a ‘performance’ model of education, then the chances of other FORs being adopted and adapted must become less.

## **Scope and limitations of the study and its place in the broader field of social theories of learning**

This thesis has explored the ways in which twenty-five pupils' in the second and third years of their secondary education speak of making sense of factors that form a basis for lifelong learning. As such the study is too small to make generalisations, this was never the intention of the work. Alone this study provides a glimpse at the possibilities of the tensions that may exist between the actuality of education policy in the form of 'performance' education, as experienced by pupils, and the rhetoric of education policy in the form of 'lifelong learning' dispositions. When viewed within the field of social and policy related theories of lifelong learning, given the consistency of the findings in this study with those of other researchers, strands of concern begin to form.

During primary school years it has been shown that the heavy reliance on literacy and numeracy, while arguably 'raising standards' may be undermining the development of the frames of reference required to support a 'competence' based perspective of lifelong learning. It is suggested that pupils "play the system", are reserved, bored, risk-averse and do not fully engage in learning. They fail to maximise learning opportunities, being pragmatic and instrumental, poorly informed and non-reflexive about their learning (Broadfoot and Pollard, 2000; Pollard and Triggs, 2000). Children do not see a need to go beyond the set curriculum and rarely connect the curriculum to their outside lives; even those who work hard and achieve are unlikely always to be enamoured by all aspects of school (Cullingford, 1991). In older children, I also have found pupils to be instrumental, performing learning activities to gain grades, often uncertain about the purposes of learning beyond that the knowledge is needed for a test. And even for those young people who work hard and do like aspects of school this rarely translates into a deep desire to master knowledge or go beyond what they think the teacher expects of them.

As the pupils' in this study moved through Key Stage 3 so did their intrinsic interest appear to wane, a finding reiterated in those of other researchers (Keys and Fernandes, 1993; Blatchford, 1996). Harris et al., (1995) write of enjoyment being sacrificed as success begins to be related to how pupils achieve in tests and pupils become more

concerned with rote learning in order to gain qualifications (Rudduck et al, 1996). But where, Harris et al., and Rudduck et al., spoke of this occurring in Year 10 as the pressures of GCSEs began to be experienced, in this study it is suggested that intrinsic reward may be being sacrificed earlier as national tests dominate.

Rudduck et al., (1996) found as pupils' awareness of their 'abilities' grew, so too did the feelings of failure among students, often believing it to be safer, for the preservation of their image, not to try than to try and fail. They were more likely to be self-conscious and embarrassed at being seen to require assistance, not always understanding that this was an acceptable route open to them and this often resulted in a downward spiral as they fell further and further behind with their learning (Rudduck et al, 1996). This supports the work of Phelan et al., (1992) who found pupils who achieved less were less likely to persist in seeking help from teachers. Students tended to believe that extrinsic rewards were required to motivate them, yet for those who did not keep up such rewards were insufficient to prevent them dropping out (Rudduck et al., 1996). Nor is it only in England that such findings persist. From his findings in a study of secondary school pupils in New Zealand, Nash (1998) concludes that:

"One of the most formidable barriers to learning . . . must be the poor aspirations, low self-conceptions of scholastic ability, and the overall sense of being able to do better but 'tired of trying', that characterise so many students whose performance at school undergoes a marked relative decline." (p. 77).

Similarly, in this thesis, it has been shown how persistent lack of 'success' may, for some young people result in feelings of 'hopelessness' or 'helplessness', where they are 'tired of trying' and this in turn leads them to reassess the probability of achieving long held aspirations. But in terms of seeking help, it was not only low achievers that found this problematic. Matthew, a high achieving pupil in the urban school spoke of not seeking help because he thought the teacher assumed he should have particular knowledge because he was in the top set. Nor is it only secondary age pupils' whatever their outward appearance and from all backgrounds and achievement levels want to succeed (Woods, 1990; Phelan et al.,



1992; Rudduck et al, 1996). In this who lose heart. By at least the age of 8 (Cullingford, 1991), pupils begin to compare their academic limitations with those of others, and when such comparison begins, so too can be developed a sense of failure and the start of the process of 'giving up'. This message is reiterated in the work of Pollard and Triggs (2000). Of greater concern is the possibility of the long-term effects of such meaning making. Outcomes of assessment do not only provide marks and grades of student attainment, they furnish individuals with 'knowledge' of themselves as learners, knowledge that may affect their motivations and their self-esteem (Filer and Pollard, 2000a). In this study, too, are examples of these developing identities gained through comparison with others, through teacher judgements, test results and sets. Assessments provide marks for the students, labels of 'success' or 'failure', rarely turning into positive learning or ways of improving, other than to 'try harder'. Pupils at secondary school, study, almost all pupils spoke of wanting to achieve good grades in their GCSEs; poignantly, Kelly, a pupil whose school records might lead to the conclusion being drawn that she is 'disaffected', talks of wanting A and B grades yet she knows she is "only dreaming". Kelly wants to leave school as soon as possible; she has played truant and she has been temporarily excluded from school.

For some students their only immediate goal may be to leave school, some not making it through to the end of compulsory education (Ball et al., 1999). Others may go on to further education, but would prefer to find a job ('hangers-in'); may regard further education as 'better' than the work or vocational training options available to them but regard learning as simply the presence in school or college ('notional acceptors'); while others are prepared to endure two more years of learning in the hope of a 'good' job ('pragmatic acceptors'). This last group, Ball et al., suggest, are not fully engaged in, nor gain intrinsic reward from, the process of learning. This group, the authors suggest, may make up the majority of students in Britain. A further group of students, mainly from the middle classes, actively elect to continue education ('embedded'). They speak with enthusiasm about learning opportunities, have a sense of being able to fulfil ambitions, and are in the process of "becoming somebody". Their previous educational experiences have

provided them with a sense of achievement, self-esteem and 'worthwhileness' and usually intend to pursue their educational career into higher education. Ball et al., (1999) suggest a need to understand how compulsory schooling produces the positions, educational aspirations and learning identities of learners, in order to understand the patterns of participation post-16. In this thesis a small start has been made in illuminating the complex patterns of the ways in which young people in their early years in secondary school interpret and make sense of their world of learning. It is not possible to predict future outcomes from present thinking yet the descriptions of 'types' of learners provided for post-16 students by Ball et al., bring to mind individuals from the Class of 25. It begs us to ask the question to what extent do the frames of reference that young people develop through the years of compulsory schooling influence their dispositions through their lives?

Future aspirations tell much about who people are and what they want to become (Nash, 1998). But young people may have very different forms of 'imagined' futures and, he argues, about what they hope to achieve through education. Some, especially those taking A-levels and progressing into higher education, have relatively clear, stable and possible ideas; others have vague ideas about areas of interest such as 'computers' or 'business', or a 'proper' job and recognise the need for further qualifications; yet others seem unable to articulate imagined futures. These young people appear aimless, 'cope with' life and are often overtaken by domestic events beyond their control (Ball et al., 1999). They suggest that for many young people, there is little choice when they leave school. Their choices are constrained by the academic profiles at GCSE level that provide the main means of "differential positioning of young people". Young people internalise the profile and try to define themselves in other ways; the "realities" of GCSE results destroying any tentative aspirations they may hold. I suggest, from the findings of this study, that the current emphasis on national testing at 7, 11 and 14, and the positioning this results in, may lead to tentative aspirations being destroyed even before they begin courses of study for GCSEs, for some young people.

But the research of Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) in to the learning dispositions of post-16 year old learners, remind us of the fickle nature of the dispositions to learning, of the:

“... complexities of relationships between positions and dispositions, and between contexts, meanings, identity and learning.” (p. 593)

In their research they found young people's learning careers to be affected, not only by their experiences of formal education but by learning that occurred beyond the college gates and the life experiences that the young people encountered. Nevertheless, broad patterns also began to emerge, including the increasing instrumentalism found in the choices made, especially of working class pupils who tended to lack the economic and the cultural capital to support academic routes. However, not all young people responded in the same way. Much depended on the situatedness of the learning episodes both within and beyond the settings of formal education. The contextual complexities and the broad patterns of instrumentalism and the influence of socio-economic positions that Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) describe in their research into the dispositions to learning in post-16 students, are seen also in this thesis, but in pupils' of a younger age.

Whether at primary, secondary or post-compulsory education each of these pieces of research provides an interpretation of data that suggests the predominance of a 'performance' model of education resides in the minds of young learners. For many students across the age ranges, there seems to be little or no intrinsic reward sought or gained from formal learning. Interestingly at each phase of education it is suggested that any intrinsic reward that may exist, decline with age. Students, especially if they struggle to achieve academically, show signs of withdrawal and learner helplessness and have a low self-concept of their own abilities as learners. Aspirations, linked so closely to present social position as well as future hoped for place, wax and wane, but ultimately are likely to be released and constrained by the capitals available and the capitals desired.

This thesis adds to this picture, providing insights into the complexities of the ways in which young people make sense of their learner identities and what it means to learn. It focuses on pupils' own interpretations and allows pupil voices to be privileged. By analysing at the level of the individual, like the work of Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) dealing with older students, this study has illuminated the complexities of meaning making

among young adolescents, showing as it does the continuities and change that occur over time, and from situation to situation. Broad patterns do emerge and these concur in general with the findings detailed above. But what this study highlights perhaps most of all, is the probable inadequacy of current education policy to solve the problem of boys and lower socio-economic underachievement through the use of targets, tests, and vocational education. The policies adopted may, contrary to the rhetoric, be hindering most the very young people it wants to set out on the road to lifelong learning.

It is in the individual variations of similar stories that so many unanswered questions still lie. While this study has considered the FORs pupils' use to make sense of themselves as learners and the process of learning, and has begun to explore the possible affects the positions young people hold in the socio-cultural domain have on their understandings, there remains much to be done. Firstly there is a need to consider, as the work of Pollard and Filer (1996; 1999) has done for primary children, the role of the interpersonal domain. How are FORs shaped and constrained by the social practices young people encounter? This needs to include not only the classroom practices of formal education but also the influential encounters young learners have with their parents, siblings, peers and the broader community that is their world. Secondly as in the work of Pollard and Filer (1996; 1999) and Bloomer and Hodgkinson (2000), learning careers need to be taken into account. How do FORs form and transform over 'lifetimes', and how do these interrelate to the changing - or constant - dispositions to lifelong learning? Thirdly, there is a need to ask how FORs interrelate with dispositions to learning and how these interrelate with the social positions that become the destinies of individual young people.

If 'lifelong learning' is to be about the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes assumed to be required to support a 'high skills' economy, and provide personal development and growth as well as promoting social inclusion and democracy, then there is a need to understand much more about how present normative frameworks and assumptions, as interpreted by individuals, help or hinder such development in *all* people. This thesis contributes in providing part of the foundations of such understanding.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Draft letter wording to parents**

#### **Research into Pupil's Learning**

From time to time the school is asked to participate in Educational Research being conducted by postgraduate students at local universities. We have recently been approached by Mrs Norma Adair, a doctoral student at the University of Bath, who has requested assistance with her research into learning during the Key Stage 3. The research findings will be shared with the school, for the benefit of our own learning, providing insights into our own practices in education.

Mrs Adair is studying young people's perceptions of, commitment to and aspirations from, learning. She would like to work with a number of Year 8 pupils, discussing with them their views about learning. In order to explore how pupil perceptions may change through the Key Stage, she would then like to conduct some follow-up research through Year 9 with the same pupils. Additionally, Mrs Adair would like access to the pupil's SATs, test results and reports. These will be used with anonymity and in confidence in her research findings. Neither the school, nor any pupil will be named in the research; nor will pupils' expressed views be individually identified to the school.

Your son/daughter's name has been selected at random for this research and I write to ask if you would be willing for his/her participation.

Initially, all that is required is for the children selected to meet with Mrs Adair and to record how they see themselves as a learner. This will involve a two-hour activity and will take place at the school on

This initial meeting will be followed up by individual interviews with the pupils lasting no more than 40 minutes each and consisting of some straight forward questions. These interviews will be conducted at the school during the remainder of this term.

Following analysis by Mrs Adair of the data, a further interview of 30 minutes duration is planned to occur in the first half of the Autumn term in Year 9 and a final interview, again of around 30 minutes duration, in the late Spring/early Summer term of Year 9.

I have already spoken to your son/daughter about this and as he/she is willing, I write to seek your permission for him/her to take part in this research project.

If you would be willing for your child to take part in this project, please sign the form below and return it as soon as possible.

Thank you for your help.

## Appendix B: Interview structures for first round of interviews

### *Personalised questions*

**Interview Schedule: School C**  
**Student H**

**May 2000**

- Remind them of confidentiality.
  - In order to gain as full and as deep an understanding of your views as possible, it will be helpful if you can answer the questions as fully as possible. If a question is asked that you do not wish to give an answer to, please say. Likewise if you do not have a view or do not understand a question, let me know.
  - Ask for permission to tape record the interview
- 

1. You wrote about the activities you do out of school: writing a book, playing on the computer, watching some TV programmes, listening to music, sport – football, netball and sailing, drawing, cooking, walking and playing games/frightening your brother.
    - Tell me a bit more about some of these activities.
      - What do you enjoy about them?
      - What do you not enjoy about them?
    - You wrote that you used to learn the piano but that you have given this up as you didn't like the teacher and didn't enjoy playing when you had to practice. What was it in particular that you didn't like about the teacher and practicing?
    - You also wrote that you started to learn to play the harp but have given that up. Was there any particular reason for giving up?
    - Tell me about the acting club you used to go to.
      - What changed that meant you didn't like it any more?
    - These statements are about the amount of learning that may take place. For the different activities we have been talking about, which statement most accurately describes the amount of learning going on?
    - You say you are all right at singing. What do you mean by all right?
    - Here are some statements about ability. Thinking about your ability in the activities you do out of school, can you tell me which activities match most closely which statements?
      - How do you work out how able you are in these activities?
- 

2. Let's move on to school. You wrote that sometimes you like school and sometimes you don't. Tell me about times when you enjoy it.
  - What about times when you don't?
  - You wrote that Latin is your favourite language and that you hate/dislike French and wish they'd structure it like in Latin. Describe what happens in Latin and French.

- You wrote that you don't like Geography because the teacher is big headed and you spend too much time of uninteresting things. Tell me more about Geography.
- You wrote that you like History and that you are interested in it. Tell me more about what you do in History.
- Tell me about Theology lessons which you wrote you are not interested in because you are not religious.
- English, you wrote, is your favourite subject and you also wrote that you don't do a lot in the lessons. Tell me about English lessons.
- You wrote that Games are all right but that you are often with someone you don't like. What is all right about Games?
- You like Maths even though it seems a bit pointless. What do you mean by pointless?
  - What do you like about Maths?
- Tell me about Art lessons.
- What about Music lessons, you wrote you don't like music theory?
- You wrote that you like Science but you don't like the lessons. Tell me more about Science lessons.
- You wrote that you like DT because you like engineering and making things. Tell me more about DT.
- Here are the statements about how much you learn. Can you give me examples of subjects or activities within subjects for which any of these statements would be true?
  - Explore
- You wrote that your brother is very brainy and that you used to get jealous and down hearted about him being brainier than you, but not now. What made you change do you think?
  - How did you know that your brother was brainier than you?
- These statements are about ability. Thinking about your ability can you match any of these with subjects or activities within subjects?
  - How do you work out how able you are?

3. Is everybody equally 'able' do you think?
  - Explore
4. How 'able' do you think other people think you are? (Friends, other people in class, family [you wrote your mum thinks everything you do is wonderful, your dad tells you truthfully what he thinks about your work and that is sometimes hard to know whether he is pleased or not], teachers)

5. What would you say was important to you in your life?
  - If not mentioned, compared to these things, how important is learning to you?

6. Thinking about all the activities you are involved in, in or out of school,

- Tell me about times when you've been really keen, hardly able to wait to get going on an activity.
  - Tell me about times when you've not wanted to do something.
  - What really switches you on to learning?
  - What switches you off?
- 

7. What do you think the purpose of learning is?

8. After you leave school, you say you would like to be an author. Do you think you'll do any learning then?

- How, where etc.
- 

9. Finally, to help me build a fuller picture about you I'd like to ask a few questions about those you live with:

- What do you think your mum/dad/other would like you to do in the future?
  - Are these the same as your hopes?
  - How important do you think they think learning is for you?
  - You wrote that your Mum is Doctor and your Father designs computer chips. What education/qualifications/training do they have?
- 

Thank you for your co-operation. When I've collected all the data, I will write up a short summary of what I think you have told me which I'd like to discuss with you at the start of Year 9. Are you happy for me to do this? I may also need to refer back to you in the meantime, will this be OK?

Are there any questions you would like to ask me?



*Round 1 Interview template*

**Interview Schedule: School**

**March 2000**

- Remind them of confidentiality.
  - In order to gain as full and as deep an understanding of your views as possible, it will be helpful if you can answer the questions as fully as possible. If a question is asked that you do not wish to give an answer to, please say. Likewise if you do not have a view or do not understand a question, let me know.
  - Ask for permission to tape record the interview
- 

1. Tell me about how you spend your time when you're not in school.
    - Why do you do them?
    - What do you enjoy about them?
    - What do you not enjoy about them?
    - From these statements on how much you enjoy them, what scores would you give?
    - Do you think you learn anything from them?
      - If so, what etc.
    - If appropriate, how would you score your ability (given statements) in this activity?
      - What makes you think that etc.
- 

2. Let's move on to school.
- 

3. Is everybody equally 'able' do you think?
    - Explore
  4. How 'able' do you think other people think you are? (Friends, other people in class, family, teachers)
- 

5. What would you say was important to you in your life?
    - If not mentioned, compared to these things, how important is learning things to you?
- 

6. Thinking about all the activities you are involved in, in or out of school,
    - Tell me about times when you've been really keen, hardly able to wait to get going on an activity.
    - Tell me about times when you've not wanted to do something.
    - What really switches you on to learning?
    - What switches you off?
-

7. What do you think the purpose of learning is?
  8. After you leave school, do you think you'll do any learning?
    - How, where etc.
- 

9. Finally, to help me build a fuller picture about you I'd like to ask a few questions about those you live with:
    - Tell me about home, who lives there?
    - What do you think your mum/dad/other would like you to do in the future?
    - Is the same as your hopes?
    - What job(s) do they do?
    - How important do you think they think learning is for you?
    - What education/qualifications/training do they have?
- 

Thank you for your co-operation. When I've collected all the data, I will write up a short summary of what I think you have told me which I'd like to discuss with you at the start of Year 9. Are you happy for me to do this? I may also need to refer back to you in the meantime, will this be OK?

Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

## **Appendix C: Interview structures for second round of interviews**

### **Questions for Second Round of Interviews – October/November 2000**

#### **Evaluations/Judgements**

1. I'd like you to give me examples, if you can, of comments people have made about work you have done or activities you have taken part in, in or out of school.
  - Explore other examples – positive/negative
  - Explore what action, if any this has resulted in on the part of learner
2. When you've taken a test or exam, how are the results given to you?
  - How have you felt when you've found out the results of the tests?
  - After you've been given the results what happens next?

#### **Options**

1. If you had a completely free choice of what you could learn about in Year 10 and 11 what would be on your timetable? You don't have to think only of school subjects.
  - Are there any subjects or types of learning activities that you definitely wouldn't want to do?
  - Use the answers to explore
    - Where they'd like the learning to take place
    - What kinds of activities and who would most help them to learn
    - Would they want to work in groups – size/friendship/age range/alone
    - Are there choices based on past experience or something else

## **Appendix D: Interview structures for third round of interviews**

### **Fostering Lifelong Learning Research: Interviews: 3<sup>rd</sup> Round**

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me again. This is the last round of questioning. As before, anything you tell me will be kept confidential. It is very helpful for me, if you try to answer the questions as fully as possible but if there are questions you do not want to answer, this is fine. If you don't understand something, please ask me to explain better.

#### **Learning**

1. Tell me about what you have learned this year
  - What's the point of learning this?
  - How do you know you've learned it?
2. Do teachers ever talk to you about 'learning'?
  - What sorts of things do they say?
3. Do you ever: (then ask for examples)
  - Have a say in what you learn about?
    - Does this make a difference in how you feel about learning?
  - Find out information for yourself, through research?
  - Memorise information?
  - Have to be imaginative?
  - Discuss what you are learning about with other people?
    - Who would it be and what sorts of things might you talk about?
  - Copy information from books, worksheets or the board or copy down what the teacher is saying?
  - Have to put forward your own ideas?
  - Have to think about other people's point of view?
  - Have to consider what the strengths and weaknesses of your work are?
    - If so, what happens next?
  - Work out ways to solve problems?
  - Consider how you feel?
  - Do practical things?
  - Spend time thinking?
4. Which of these ways of learning do you like the most?
5. Which of these ways of learning do you think helps you most to learn?

#### **Tests**

You have just taken your Key Stage 3 tests.

1. Tell me about them.

2. Do you think you could do everything you were tested on?
3. Just before the tests, what did you learn about in:
  - English?
  - Maths?
  - Science?
4. Do you think you learned anything by taking the tests?
  - If so what?
  - Why do you need to learn this?

### **Options**

1. Tell me what you have chosen for your options for next year.
2. Why have you chosen these subjects?

### **The Future**

Just before you start your GCSE years:

1. What are you hoping to achieve by the end of Year 11?
2. What do you hope to do after that?
3. What are your long-term dreams for the future, if any?
4. Are there things you would like to do but think you would not be able to do?

Thank you for giving up your time to answer my questions. Are there any points you'd like to raise with me?

## **Appendix E: Interview questions for teachers**

### **Perceptions of Learning Research**

#### **Questions for Teachers**

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I'm currently researching children's perceptions of learning focussing on Key Stage 3 pupils. I have asked to speak with a number of teachers to gain another perspective on the children's talk. The research will form part of my PhD thesis but everything that you say will be treated in confidence and any reference to the school and individual's will be concealed. To aid my memory I would like to record the interview if you have no objections.

In answering the questions I'd like you to particularly bear in mind Year 9 teaching.

1. Do you ever talk to pupils about learning?
  - What might you say?
2. Do you think you are able to meet the learning needs of each individual pupil?
  - How do you achieve this?
  - What helps you to do this?
  - What hinders you?
3. Tell me about how you think current education policy affects your teaching of Year 9 pupils.
4. For each of the students I will read out, that you teach (or have taught), please describe them in terms of 'learner'

Thank you for your co-operation. Have you any questions for me?

## **Appendix F: The pupils, themselves and as learners**

*Barry*

I like playing football, basketball.

I like English, maths most

Like to play on the computer and stuff at home but most of the time I watch telly.

Oak Park is alright. Some kids keep on bullying. The breaks aren't long enough – only quarter of an hour, should be 20 minutes. They should have shorter summer holiday and longer at Easter. The food is nice, the chips are, and the cakes and baguettes and sandwiches, but they do tuna ones which I don't like and they're too dear . . .

At break I hang around with my friends – Matty, Tim, Trevor. Don't do much not much to do. Should make it more interesting down in the courts – should be more stuff. Should be allowed to wear t-shirts under our shirts because it's cold. Should be more school uniform days. Should be able to dye your hair whatever colour you want cos it doesn't affect your work, but you're not allowed to, it's got to be a natural colour. And there's too many kids here. If you hang your bag up and go back it's been stamped on cos there's not enough room. And for detention depending on what you've done, it's usually half hour but if you've only been talking it should be 10 minutes. And sometimes kids on the next tables throw chips at lunchtime and we get detentions for things we didn't do.

I got a cat called Tiddles – a year old in February. My cousin she's only 1 and my auntie got a little kitten and my cousin put it in the tumble drier but it lived. I've load of fish. I had a dog but it died. In the holidays I go up in the forest on my bike and do jumps and that and in November I'm going to Florida for two weeks.

On Sunday's me, my granddad and all my uncle's we go up the forest and there's a scrambling bit and we play crazy golf.

In Oak Park, the kids would work more if there were more fun things. If we had better things to do like practical, cos most of the time we do writing and it gets boring and like in the summer it gets hot and we do writing.

Was doing science homework in computer room at lunchtime for this afternoon.

Got computer at home. Got PC/Windows 98. Got encyclopedia. Dinner time be good if school let you play with basketballs.

### *Briony*

Hello my name is Briony, my friends call me Bri, I live quite far away from school in a small hamlet (Hamley Hill) near Catton. I live in a cottage/small house with a bigish garden with my mum who is a Art dealer and has her a shop with paintings and furniture (Antiques) My dad who works away quite a lot, as his company is in Germany. He is a sales director. I also have two half sister who have both left home, aged 22 and 25, Ulrika (U.J) who is 22 she would like to be maths train teacher so is at teachers training college in Oxford, my oldest sister Rosie who is 25 is a model and works with agensise Starlight. I don't have any pets but love cats so am homing giving two kittens <sup>a home</sup> in April. I also love horses so look after a horse down the road. We ne live next door to a country pub, were there is a girl my age who is a good friend. There are lots of things I like to do in my spare time, I love all sports which I think is to do with learning as you learn how to work in a team, I love riding and go whenever I can (not very often because of Saturday school) I love Arts and making things also doing creative writing e.g stories, poems, the stories I write in my spare time I draw pictures for. I love animals, we just last year moved to the country which I love, as I wacht all the wildlife, there are so many things I like doing. I love gong on holiday and as my dad works in lots of different places, I have been very lucky to have traveled all around the Far East, (I was also born in Singapore) all this is to do with learning.

I enjoy listening to music like the Cors and lots of other stuff. I love reading as well book written by Robin Jarvis as he writes very imaginary books about weird creatures good and evil! I hate computers I don't have one at home and am glad as I would hate the idea of sitting in a small stuffey room trying to work out how to change the font, even the though it is very educational.

I love seeing my two older sisters as they take me out into London shopping and to the cinema. I also enjoy meeting up with my friends and going to each others houses. I think school is quite fun but I completely disagree with Saturday school as I get very over tied and streesful. Prep



is ok as you have no homework when you get back<sup>home</sup>. I think it is important to enjoy all your lessons and if you don't you are less likely to work and try hard. We subject like Art, Geography and History, Games as well, I enjoy them because I like the teacher as well as the subject, I am also starting to enjoy maths more because we have a new teacher. I am looking forward to next year as I will have more independen and there will be more girls as there aren't many at the moment. I find learning fun in somecases but I know most people disagree. It really depends what kind of learning, I enjoy working in groups and like most school work. I think I would enjoy French more if I had a different teacher as ours can't control us so I don't feal I'm learning anything at all. I enjoy theology as I love hearing about the stories it is also interesting as part of my family is Jewish. I however am not realigious (not Roman Catholic/christian) but am interested in Pagan realigions. In nature and it's gods, as well as future telling and mgick (NOT MAGICK TRICKS!) I believe whatever you bealieave in is true. I enjoy music and drama I play the piano and have just finished my grade two exam.

When I'm older I want to travel as I find it lots of fun and you learn ~~stuff~~ things two. ~~Prepbe~~ Probably the most favourite place I have ever been to is ether Malasia or the Philippees. I'm not sure what I want to be job wise, but something exciting. Definetely not cooped up in a office!!! One of my ambitions that ~~my~~ probably sounds silly, is I wan't to go to America and ride like a cowboy! I've wanted to do that since I was very small.

I love wachttng films especially comedy's as they make me laugh ones like friends, something about Mary and lots<sup>of</sup> others, I also enjoy thrillers, as I like being scared, things like I know what you did last sommer and I want to see 'Don't look now' as I have just been to venice and ot's sounds scary. In May I am also going to see the Rocky Horror Show with my friends, I think your friends and family are very important as they support you when you are sad and make you laught be happy.

Now you know all about me and my life!

Bye!

*Diane*

HI MY NAME IS Diane. Im 13 years old I go to WILLOW WAY SCHOOL. My best mate is  
Claire.

I am quite friendly and have loads of friends, I Like mucking around and being NOISY/LOUD;;;. Im into makeup and doing other peoples hair especially my own. At discos I enjoy

Dancing to the latest hits. My favourite hit at them moment is PURE SHORES by the ALL SAINTS

Whenever I have any spare time I like to read, The book I love read is THE LOTTIE PROJECT by Jacqueline Wilson. It is all about two girls called Charlotte. One girl lives in modern times and the other in Victorian tiems. They go on to tell us about there every day lifestyles. It is good for people who Dislike every thing about school;.

*Edmond*

Edmond

I enjoy many things at school like PE , English , Science , and Games.

There are also things that I don't like including Geography , Maths and German. The things that I find ok are History and French.

While I have been at this school I have been in two different tutor Groups .There are a lot of things that I enjoy out of school like Football , Basketball , Swimming , Watching T.V. and bike riding.

By now you can probably tell that outside of school I am a totally Different person.

*Felicity*

Hello, my name is Felicity my friends call me Felicity and I live in Kington near B Langley which is between Castington and Cole. I live with my Mum – disabled, father and Brother, my aunt and Nanny looks after us a lot. I have a big <sup>messy</sup> garden ~~with in it there are~~ I have lots of pets – 12 ducks, 8 chicks and three cats. My brother plays on the computer a lot and I don't have any friends near home so I don't go out a lot except when it is raining because I love rain. My mum is a doctor and is very protective of us, she thinks everything ~~me and my br~~ my brother and I do is wonderful, My dad is designing a super intellent chip on computer with his company, he tells ~~me~~ <sup>us</sup> turefully what he thinks about <sup>the work of</sup> my brother and ~~in~~ I. Sometimes it is hard to know wheather he is pleased with us or not. My brother is very brainy and I used to get jeasouly and down hearted about how more brainer he is than me but not now. I ~~ha~~ am missing half of one arm which doesn't bother me too much. I want to be an authour when I grow up and I am starting to write a book but I probaly won't get very far, but my friends are trying to do the

same. I love reading and writeing fanatsy but I hate horror and love books and I haven't read any Science Fiction yet. I quite like playing on the computer but not always. I watch little T.V. but I do like some programs. I also like children's programs. I like music but I tend to listen to more clasical music rather than pop music which we have to listen to on the bus to school and home. I also like making up ideas to for mystory when listening to music. I also make up my story when I'm doing nothing in a lesson or in mass.

Sport wise I like football and netball when I'm shooting, I love sailing and fe I quiet quite like fencing but I don't get much chance to do them.

I also like doing Art and do it in my spare time, I like to draw pictures about my stories. I used to go to Davely joiner junior in Langley, non independent. Sometimes I like school sometimes I don't. I'm not very good at spelling as you can probaly tell but I am not distetic so I do de Latin which is my favorite Langue but I don't like the teacher I have now. I hate/dislike french beea partly because I'm no good at it and wish they'd do it structured like Latin in tables and thing and partly because our teacher can't keep order and doesn't teach us much. I'm afriad I spend lots of time thinking about my story in French but I don't talk a lot then, mostly because I sit on my own or with someone I don't like. I also don't like geography because the teacher is to big headed and we spend too much time on unintressing things, I like history though and I am very intrressed in it. I am non religious so I'm not very intrressed in Theology. English is my favorite subject but we don't do a lot in the lessons. Games is alright but I'm often with someone I don't like a so that is annoying and even Wednesday I am on my own really because all my friends are in matches but that I am not good enough to be in but I ann team B's shotter which I like being. I like maths but sometimes it seems a bit ponitless but I like it anyway. Art is fun when we actuly start but our teacher blabbers on for about half the lesson and this term we has have a very strange teacher a-how who says thing I don't understand like 'Your strong point is that your lines are very senetive?' I don't like music Theory to. I tried to learn the piano but I gave up two times beacause, I didn't like the teacher and I wasn't praticing enough but I can't enjoy doning it when thei you 'have' to practice. I also tried too learning the harp but gave up aswell. I'm alright at singing. I quitee like science but I don't like the lessons. I used to be afried of space but I find it intrressing now but I wouldn't like to be an astronaut. I like enginnering and making which is why I like D.T. as well.

I like acting and used to go to an acting club and was the main part once in a play, my brother was the baddy, but after a while it changed I didn't like it any more so me-an my brother and I left.

I like cooking too and my cousin and I make up freak recipes. I like walking and frightening brother etc. with pipe lagging, I also like boncing around and party games and things. I go to art club in school. I don't like Saturday school but I like loong hoildays.

Think that's all I want to say really

Bye!

*Flo*

I've had quite a few problems like th spelling and reading. I had this the most in primary school at (school name) its got better I've had more help. I love drawing and writting in a styleish way. Art is my favourot subjuet but I don't like maths I find that hard and I'm very shy I've just become library librauin its quite fun I help put the books away on my section. some of my friends our year sevens diene diane & Belinda & Laura

*Isla*

Most of the time I enjoy learning but there are some subjects I know I can't eeneet concentrate in like Maths and Science mainly because there are boys in those lessons that always distract us all.

My faveourate lessons that I love going to are:

Drama ~ even to though I'm not so good at it !

German ~ be'ause I like Learning new languages.

French ~     “       “                   “

And there are some lessons I dread going to like:

Geography ~ because I'm in the top set I feel I shouldn't be because I'm not that good at it.

History ~ because at my old school we did bits of History but not all that much and everyone in my set (middle) knows more about it than me.

*Jenni*

I'm 12 years old + I'm quite di,sslexit which affects my learning. I injoy school, baut but find some lessons quite hard. I learn quite fast at things like Drama or Clasics. I'm not a brilent lerner but I tort my selph to skip, wisle with my fin fingers + plat.

My spellings are o.k, but I had help from a sph speshell class.

### *Keith*

I was born on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1987. I am 13 years old and go to Oak Park in Clayton. I have plenty of friends, some from different classes. I find myself quite a could learner hear here, because I am in top set for all subjects except History. The teaching at Oak Park is really good and most of the teachers are nice and aren't strict. The most challenging subjects would have to be Maths, Science, German and English, but the subjects which are not challenging are Lifestyle, classics and Geography. Geography is my favourite subject.

I have a little sister, Beth (9), 10 in April and a Mum and Mum. An Our only pet is a Goldfish which is really my sisters called Ginger.

### *Kelly*

I am 12 year's old I have a dog called Bonnie and 2 rats My bother is called Darren Norris I have 8 conson's on my mum's side and 6 on my dad's I live at 98 Amber Dean Close Clayton I like on TV – Eastenders and I want to be a model.

### *Kevin*

Hello my name is kevin roberts I am 13 my birthday is september.I support manchester United .I like playing the playstation.I have one sister called nadia .My dad is a carpenter . I have one pet a dog called jake he is a poddle.I play football for the school and for Bears.I play football with my mates on Sundays.My best subject at school is pe.My worst is music.

### *Olivia*

~~Hello my name is Olivia and my friends call me Ollie (it has to be spelt like this)~~

I am going to write a bit about myself and my family because I think that they are very important in my ~~learn~~ learning because they do try to help me in every way they can. My friends call me Ollie and I live in a little hamlet called Quenton which happens to be an hour's drive away from school. My dad works in London and comes home every night on the train to Quenham (Art Editor) My mum works in Tubney at the General hospital as a nurse teacher. Things I like doing at home and out of school are drawing and making things I love drawing and especially strange objects. My Art teacher actually recently said my drawing style is surrealist. I like playing football but I ~~am~~ don't have the time to do football anymore (too much home work). I like doing dangerous things (sometimes I get in trouble) one day I would like to do a bungee jump and sky dive. I am also a keen traveller probably because me and my family only used to go to Cornwall and Devon I also think it could be because my father is from Jamaica (Santa Cruz) and I would like to go and see where he used to live and also because my mum is always telling stories about her going around the world about 3 times and living in Australia for 3 years with her 2 best friends.

A

At school I like to find ~~thing~~ new things out and learn <sup>more</sup> interesting facts, but I don't like going over and over things again and again that I have already learnt. I forgot to tell you about my love for different sports and Athletics apart from football because, I just love the running and adrenalin that rushes through me ~~me~~ when you are all happy doing different things. I like to try different things, something I haven't done which I would love to do would be to ride on a camel and luckily this year in the summer holidays I am going on a cruise down the Nile in Egypt and hopefully I will ride a camel then because it is a new experience and ~~I will be~~ I am sure I will love it.

I am looking forward to doing Spanish next year because I think it is a really romantic language and ~~wi~~ if you do Spanish GCSE you get to go out to Spain with the school.

I personally think that if ~~y~~ you are in a friendly environment you will learn more and enjoy learning. I really like this school some teachers aren't very nice and are very strict but I think you have to have a few people like that ~~other-wise~~ to balance ~~the~~ all the nice ~~people~~ teachers and the school wouldn't be all school without the strict teachers. ~~I hear~~ I totally forgot to mention before that I learn the flute and I am working towards grade 3 and have been playing for about 3 years now and ~~my~~ my teacher is really nice and she comforts me and makes me feel as if I am good at all times. I once played the piano but I dis-liked my teacher because she shouted at me if I got one note wrong so I quit, but my flute teacher is nothing like her and I really like her. I love singing ~~eu~~ (I don't know if I am any good at it though) and I am always singing anything that pops in<sup>to</sup> my head. I also like acting and making silly voices and silly faces up to go with my character.

*Vince*

Vince Brown

I like it at school and I like it just as much at home because I get to play with my friends at home and at school but the things I can't do at school are watch t.v ,play on the computer and other stuff like that.

I like sports like Football my favourite team is Manchester united, I also like basketball and rugby.

I like cycling and roller blades, I also like swimming.

I don't like my brother he always gets on my nerves.

*Wendy*

HI MY NAME IS WENDY I AM 13 AND I GO TO WILLOW WAY SCHOOL ITS ALL

RIGHT THE SCHOOL COULD BE IMPROVED .....

MY BEST FRIEND GO TO THE SAME SCHOOL THERE CALLED MANDY SHE REALY NICE.....MY FAVOURITE BOOK IS CALLED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MIND BODY.SPIRIT AND EARTH..ITS WRITTEN BY JOANNA CROSSE IT REALY COOL BECAUSE I CAN READ PALMS AND HEAL PEOPLE THAT ARE INJURED.....MY HOBBYS ARE ART AND MUSIC MY FAVOURITE POP GROUP IS ALL SAINTS I LOVE THERE NEW SONG PURE SHORES AND THE BEACH IS MY FAVOURITE FILM AT THE MOMENT.....I HAVE GOT TO DOGS

CALLED HOLLY AND LADY HOLLY IS A JACK RUSSLE LADY IS A CHAOURA

*William*

Hello my name is William, I enjoy learning . I like most subjects but mainly the ones I am good at (or think i am good at)

I prefer positive teaching methods, because I feel more relaxed. Some subjects I find annoying, especially ones when some people mock about or annoy the teacher, who gets annoyed at the class, who I am a member of.

I love I.T. because if you do what you meant to it will work and it does what it's told to! (the computer)

I am Dyslexic, mildly, but I have a high reading age – low spelling age. I don't find that it holds me back.

I don't like Theology (R.E.) I find it annoying that some members of the class annoy our teacher so much he gets really mad and punishes us all but mainly not punish the people responsible. All the time, so we get no work done.

I sometimes find that the day is long (8:30 – 6:00) and I get ~~tied~~ tired towards the end of term. I get especially tired ~~tied~~ having to get up on Saturday to do a morning of school.

I find it easier to work at this school, than other schools because the teacher, I feel, know what they're doing... (all bar Mr Norris when he teaches hockey) And that way we have time to do our homework at school and have good resources!

In my spare time I sail (a boat) and I use my computer at home, not just to play games on but to learn new things, of the internet, of entertainment... I also socialise with my school friends. I have a lot of holiday in which I may go to summer camp or on a family holiday or just stay at home. My parents are both older and I find some of their knowledge priceless(ish). My sister, like all weaker younger, weaker, sibling, annoying and ~~are~~ annoying, it is supposed to be 11.

I live in a large house in Youlton Park!"



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